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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE RESIDENT EVIL MOMENT



DARRAN JONES

When the shark attacks you in the excellent GameCube remake.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Monster Monpiece

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

The Licker's debut in *Resi 2* is seared into my memory – blood drips from the ceiling and then you *see* the bugger!

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
Steins;Gate 0

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



DREW SLEEP

The moment where you face your first zombie. The moment it turns its head to see you is my first memory of experiencing fear in a videogame. *Shudders*

Expertise:
Getting more Twitter verifications than Darran

Currently playing:
Final Fantasy XV

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII



SAM RIBBITS

That bit with that zombie. It was probably dark.

Expertise:
Pixels

Currently playing:
Fire Emblem

Favourite game of all time:
Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos



PAUL DRURY

The moment in the original when that first flesh-munching zombie looks up at you, blood dripping from his yellowing teeth. Yum.

Expertise:
Congenital kyphosis

Currently playing:
Game and Wario

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



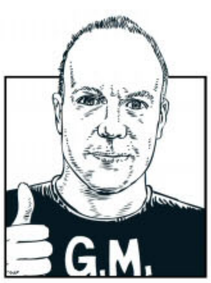
JASON KELK

Played the first one for an hour or so, didn't get into it and haven't bothered since. Sorry.

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero

Currently playing:
Gun Wings

Favourite game of all time:
Io



GRAEME MASON

Finally mixing the V-Jolt! Bet no-one else says that.

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
BioShock

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



DAVID CROOKES

The hilarious voice acting always tickled me. "Blood… I hope this is not Chris' blood," never fails to raise a smile, even now rerunning the moment on YouTube.

Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx, adventures, Dizzy, and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)

Currently playing:
Crash Team Racing

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword

LOADING...



My first encounter with *Resident Evil* was when a coworker thrust it into my hands while I was walking through the warehouse at work. "Play this, it's amazing!" he told me. I thanked him for his enthusiasm, reminded him that I owned a Saturn and merrily went on my way. As the weeks passed, more and more people started discussing zombies, dogs and herbs, but it wasn't available on my beloved Saturn at the time, so I forgot about it.

When I eventually picked up a PlayStation, Capcom's game was one of the first I purchased and while I never completed it, I loved how cinematic it felt. It was yet another example of the big change in the public's perception of gaming that had began to become apparent with the rise of the 32-bit machines and I became hooked. While *Resident Evil* never inspired me to make my own videogame, it clearly stayed in the consciousness of the developers that we've spoken to this issue. It's also rather gratifying to see everything come full circle with the knowledge that the games of those very same developers are influencing Capcom's latest iteration of its series. Sometimes, the more things change the more they stay the same…

Enjoy the magazine!



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>> Load 164 Breathing new life into classic games

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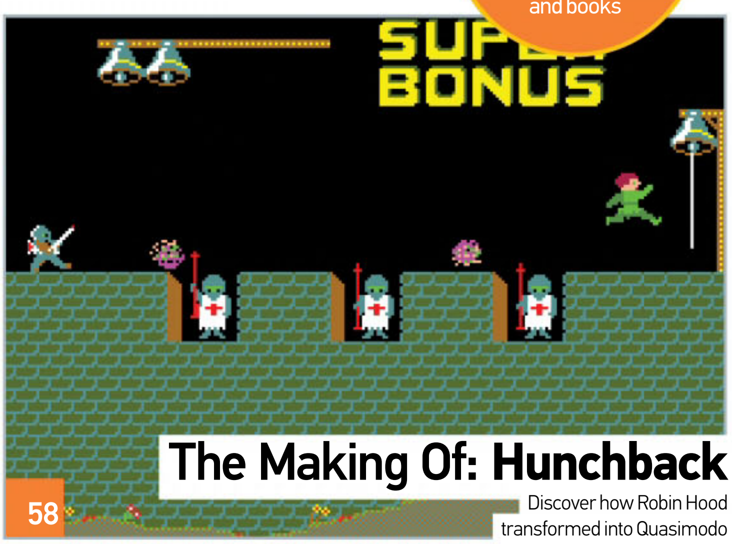






"We used a character designer who had worked for Disney and went a bit slapstick on it"





REVIEWS



ESSENTIALS





2017'S RETRO REVOLUTION

CONTENTS

The many classic games that are heading your way

We're only in January, but 2017 is already shaping up to be an excellent year for the resurrection of classic franchises. While Nintendo's Switch is gaining more and more attention, little is known about it and some of the biggest classic franchises are actually heading to Sony's PlayStation 4.

In addition to the already-planned *Crash Bandicoot* remastered trilogy being published by Activision, Sony also announced some special editions of its own. Cult PlayStation rhythm-action game, *Parappa The Rapper* is receiving a brand-new update for PS4 (a demo is already available) while Sony also announced the *WipEout Omega Collection*, which combines the content of *WipEout HD* and *Fury*, as well as the excellent PS Vita launch game, *WipEout 2048*. We're upset that no VR content has been currently announced for the collection, but are hoping a patch will be released at a later date.



» [PS4] Here's hoping the revival of *Parappa* leads to a brand-new game.

On the subject of VR, *Resident Evil VII* will be out by the time you read this and should hopefully capture the macabre brilliance of the original PlayStation hit. While it's playable on normal HD screens, VR turns it into a completely different experience. In fact, if there's no review next issue, assume that Darran has suffered a heart attack while playing it – it's that scary.

Wonder Boy fans are also in for a good 2017, as both the HD update of *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* and *Monster Boy And The Cursed Kingdom* should be appearing. The former is a glorious-looking update of the Master System classic, while the latter is a brand-new take on the classic game, with interesting new characters.

As we mentioned earlier, there's a lot of interest in the Switch, which should be arriving in March. Nintendo is still keeping its cards close to its chest, so we don't know for definite what games will actually be launching, even at this late stage. It does look like a new 3D *Mario* game will appear in its launch window, as well as updates to *Mario Kart* and possibly *Super Mario Maker*, too. *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild* is the biggest game announced for Switch so far, but it's currently unclear if it will be a launch game in Europe, although it's all but confirmed for Japan and America. Still its delay should give *Skyrim* some time to shine…

One game that was recently announced for Switch after the Wii U version was canned is the rather excellent-looking *Yooka-Laylee*, which is set to turn up in early April. Many of Playtonic's staff are comprised of ex-Rare developers and it shows in every aspect of *Yooka-Laylee*'s exceptional design. It was a huge success on Kickstarter and it has already jumped to the top of our must-play list, due to our love for the original *Banjo-Kazooie* (which it is clearly based on).

Other Kickstarter projects that we have our eye on include inXile's



» [Xbox One] While the HD version of *Wonder Boy III* looks glorious, we're more excited for *Monster Boy* if we're truly honest.



» [PS4] We're confident that *Shenmue III* won't be arriving in 2017. Prove us wrong Yu Suzuki.



» [PS4] Expect a lot more characters to get announced for *Marvel Vs Capcom Infinite*.



» [PS4] Nick's Sonic Senses are tingling, so you should be excited about *Sonic Mania*.



» [PS4] *Resident Evil VII* is looking essential, whether it's in VR or bog-standard 2D. Expect a review next issue.

Wasteland 3 and *The Bard's Tale IV*, as well as the excellent-looking *Torment: Tides Of Numenera*, which is the spiritual successor to the critically-acclaimed *Planescape: Torment* and *Toejam & Earl: Back In The Groove*, which should be arriving towards the end of the year. *Shenmue III* is also planned for a 2017 release, but we feel that it's a highly-ambitious claim and that it will most likely join *Bloodstained: Ritual Of The Night* and show up some time the following year. *Drift Stage* and *The 90's Arcade Racer* are also looking less likely for 2017, with many wondering if the latter will even receive a release.

While certain Kickstarter projects seem to be a little hit and miss at the moment, there are still plenty of traditionally funded games that do look to be on track for a 2017 release. *Marvel Vs. Capcom Infinite* is looking pretty fun from what's been shown so far, and is liable to receive more coverage once Capcom start drip-feeding more characters from both sides. *Full Throttle Remastered* is the latest offering from Double Fine, a company that seems intent on revisiting every LucasFilm game that boss Tim Schafer worked on, while *Poochy & Yoshi's Woolly World* is a 3DS update of the delightfully pleasant Wii U platformer.

"There's a lot of interest in the Switch, which should be arriving in March"

While we're on the subject of Lucasfilm, let's not forget that the excellent *Thimbleweed Park* is on its way in 2017 as well. Created by Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick, it looks like a genuinely excellent adventure, and should satisfy anyone who ever played a *Monkey Island* game or went for a stroll in *Maniac Mansion*.

Although *Sonic*'s 25th anniversary was last year, Sega is celebrating this year with two new games. *Sonic Mania* is due shortly and looks like an amazing return to form thanks to the inclusion of Christian Whitehead. It promises remixes of classic Sonic stages, as well as brand new zones. It also looks like a 2D Saturn game, which pleases us greatly. *Project Sonic 2017* is also on the way, but as so little has been announced, we're expecting it to appear in the latter half of the year, if at all.



» [Neo-Geo] We're very excited about revisting *Windjammers*. Here's hoping it receives new updates.

Oh, and before we go, we almost forgot that *Windjammers* is heading to PS4 and Vita later this year, courtesy of DotEmu. A port of *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is already available from the French publisher, courtesy of Code Mystics Inc, so we're hoping that *Windjammers* is just as good.

There's plenty more greatness on the way, including remakes of *Voodoo Vince* and *Star Control Origins*, but we've now officially run out of space. Look for more updates in future issues. *

READER'S WEIGH IN

What are you looking forward to in 2017?

It has to be *Shenmue III*. I've just completed the first one again and am nearly halfway through the second. I've been playing it with my 11-year-old daughter and she loves it, she wasn't even born the last time I completed it!
Fredghosmaster

Resident Evil VII and *Thimbleweed Park* are the titles that milk me up most.
Ncf1

The Switch is certainly an exciting prospect too, but I doubt I'll be getting one until much later in the year. With a touted initial production run of just two million units they might be hard to come by for a while too.
Matt_B

Thimbleweed Park's one of my most anticipated games for 2017, along with *Sonic Mania*. I've missed *Crash Bandicoot*, and I'm excited to see that return.
LAIS

Yooka-Laylee, that's without a doubt my most anticipated title of 2017.
Rayne

THE AGE OF ANNIVERSARIES

GET READY FOR SOME MAJOR CELEBRATIONS IN RETRO GAMER THIS YEAR

Here at Retro Gamer we love celebrating classic systems and franchises, it's kind of our 'thing'. 2017 is already looking like it's going to be an incredibly special year, with plenty of developers and publishers supporting some of their biggest franchises over the coming months.

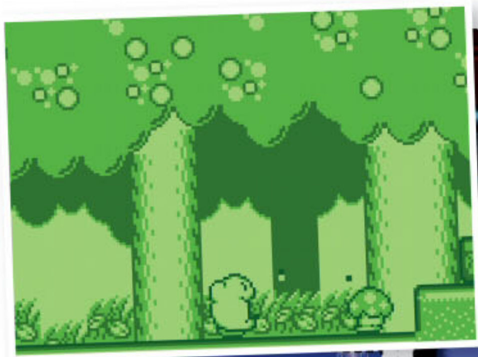
A large number of classic 8-bit systems are reaching impressive milestones this year, with the Atari 2600 (or VCS if you read the magazine in America) celebrating its 40th anniversary and the C64, ZX Spectrum, Dragon 32 and ColecoVision being just a few of the systems to turn 35 this year. The Master System and PC Engine both hit the big 30 in 2017, while the Amiga 1200 and CD-i turn 25. Needless to say, you can expect suitable coverage on each system in the coming months.

It's not just hardware that has a cause to celebrate this year – it's looking equally good for videogames, with a number of publishers celebrating classic franchises with the release of brand-new games or compilations over the coming year. One of the biggest surprises over the Christmas break was the reveal that *Double Dragon IV* would be arriving on 30 January, courtesy of Arc System Works (although it's not currently clear if that's a global release date or solely for Japan). It's interesting that the studio appears to have based its new title on the later NES games, but it still looks like a lot of fun to play and we're itching to get our hands on it.

Double Dragon isn't the only franchise being celebrated with the release of a new game in 2017. *Gran Turismo Sport* is launching to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the original PlayStation racer, *Metal Gear Survive* will launch in time with *Metal Gear*'s 30th anniversary, while FromSoftware are apparently working on a 'mech game' – maybe to celebrate *Armored Core*'s 20th year?

The biggest news is on the RPG front, however, with a number of big franchises hitting significant milestones. Atlus plans to announce several *Shin Megami Tensei* titles to tie in with its 25th anniversary, while the PS4 update of *Ys VIII: Lacrimosa Of Dana* launches in Japan this May (we wouldn't be surprise if it hits Europe later in the year). Square Enix is also gearing up for the 30th anniversary of *Final Fantasy*, with a big announcement planned for 31 January. *Phantasy Star* also turns 30 this year, but considering Sega still hasn't released *Phantasy Star Online 2* in the West (even though there's an English translation) we're not expecting much from the publisher, aside from two new *Sonic* games of course.

The likes of *Dig Dug*, *Pole Position*, *After Burner*, *Combat*, *Space Wars*, *Contra*, *Mega Man*, *R-Type*, *Football Manager*, *Street Fighter*, *Alone In The Dark*, *Ecco The Dolphin*, *Mr. Do!*, *Kirby*, *Shining Force*, *Horace*, *Fallout*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *Kingdom Hearts* are just a few of the many, many games that are hitting significant milestones in the following year, so don't be surprised if we have the banners out for the next 12 months. *





» [Mega Drive] We've been hoping to run a history of *Ecco The Dolphin* for ages.



» [PS4] The art style seems a shame, but we're confident Arc System Works will make a good brawler.

> "A large number of classic 8-bit systems are reaching impressive milestones this year"



» [Arcade] We've not done an *R-Type* cover since issue 21. Hmm…



» [NES] Darran is hoping the rumours about a collection of the first ten *Final Fantasy* games for Vita proves to be true.



» Both the Spectrum Next and Vega + should be out in time for the Spectrum's 35th anniversary.


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the vault

THE COOL RETRO STUFF THAT WE'VE HAD OUR EYE ON THIS MONTH

Let's Go Dizzy! The Story Of The Oliver Twins

We've met few people in the industry as passionate as Philip and Andrew Oliver. They're immensely proud of everything they've made and over the last 11 years they've shared some delightful stories about some of their biggest games with us.

While *Let's Go Dizzy* obviously focuses on their best-known character, there's so much more to their story and Chris Wilkins and Roger Kean have done a fantastic job in getting it all together in one place. It's an excellent tale, which is enhanced by the amazing behind the scenes access and passionate interviews from the many people the twins have worked with. Oh, and it finally reveals just why no more new *Dizzy* games were ever made by Codemasters, which for many, will be worth the price of admission alone. An absolutely brilliant read.

Price: £24.99 **From:** funstockretro.co.uk

Panzer Dragoon Soundtrack

Every single track from Yoshitaka Azuma's fantastic score has been included here and it sounds exceptional. Completely remastered, it's available on either classic black or sky blue and comes with three bonus synthesizer tracks, including the gloriously uplifting *Flight*. Another brilliantly presented Data Discs release that will delight your ears.

Price: £22.99 **From:** data-discs.com

PICK OF THE MONTH



Phoenix IV: The History Of Videogame Industry

While it has an obviously US-centric viewpoint, Leonard Herman's book is no less compelling. Now on its fourth edition, it offers a staggeringly in-depth viewpoint of the games industry from its embryonic beginnings in the Fifties, right up to 2015. While it's light on interview content, it's absolutely jam-packed with fascinating facts, with many that should surprise even the most knowledgeable retro purist.

Price: £32 **From:** amazon.co.uk

Oddworld Mudokon Enamel Badge Set

This officially-licensed set of badges features four Mudokon emotions from the classic PlayStation game. The badges themselves are 2.5cm in size, feature useful butterfly clasps and are housed in a rather lovely velveteen collector's box. It's the perfect addition to any *Oddworld* fan's clothing and ships with a free art card.

Price: £14.99 **From:** gametee.co.uk

2600 Console Wallet

If you love Atari's 8-bit console you might want to invest in this officially-licensed wallet. The bicast leather wallet has plenty of slots for your precious cash and ID cards and feels surprisingly durable. Best of all, it's a faithful replica of the original console, right down to the screws found on the system's base.

Price: £11.99 **From:** funstockretroco.uk

Here's my bio... Paul Rose
Paul Rose is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator and chief writer of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser.* These days, he mostly writes for kids TV, but can still be found rambling on about games, old and new, for his daily website, Digitiser2000.com.

Pixels > Polygons

Game graphics were better in the olden days weren't they? No, really – they were. Wait – stop! Don't go and check. It doesn't work that way. Allow me to explain…

I believe that we've all been spoiled by modern graphics, all of those freaky polygons and renders. Back when games were new, systems had but a fraction of the power available to today's developers, graphics were incredibly sparse and basic. Artists did the absolute best that they could with the tools they had available to them. There was an artistry to that, which didn't call upon scanned textures, or clever ambient lighting systems dreamt up by a team of programmers.

Sure, some games obviously looked better than others – clearly there was a gulf between, say, 3D *Haunted Hedges* and *Knight Lore* – but we forgave games for that. Now that everything is striving to be photorealistic, and you can't move in a modern game without walking face-first into a sunset, it's actually easier to say when a game has – subjectively speaking – 'bad' graphics.

It's that Uncanny Valley thing. The more real-looking games get, the more we notice the things that aren't real-looking; looped animation cycles, dead-eyed facial expressions, clothes that don't wrinkle naturally…

Games on my old Spectrum were all looped animation cycles, glass-eyed faces, and unwrinkled clothing – but I didn't care as much as I do when I notice it now`. In fact, I didn't even notice at all. At no point during *Jet Set Willy* was I distracted by the lack of a physics engine, or realistically-flowing cloth.

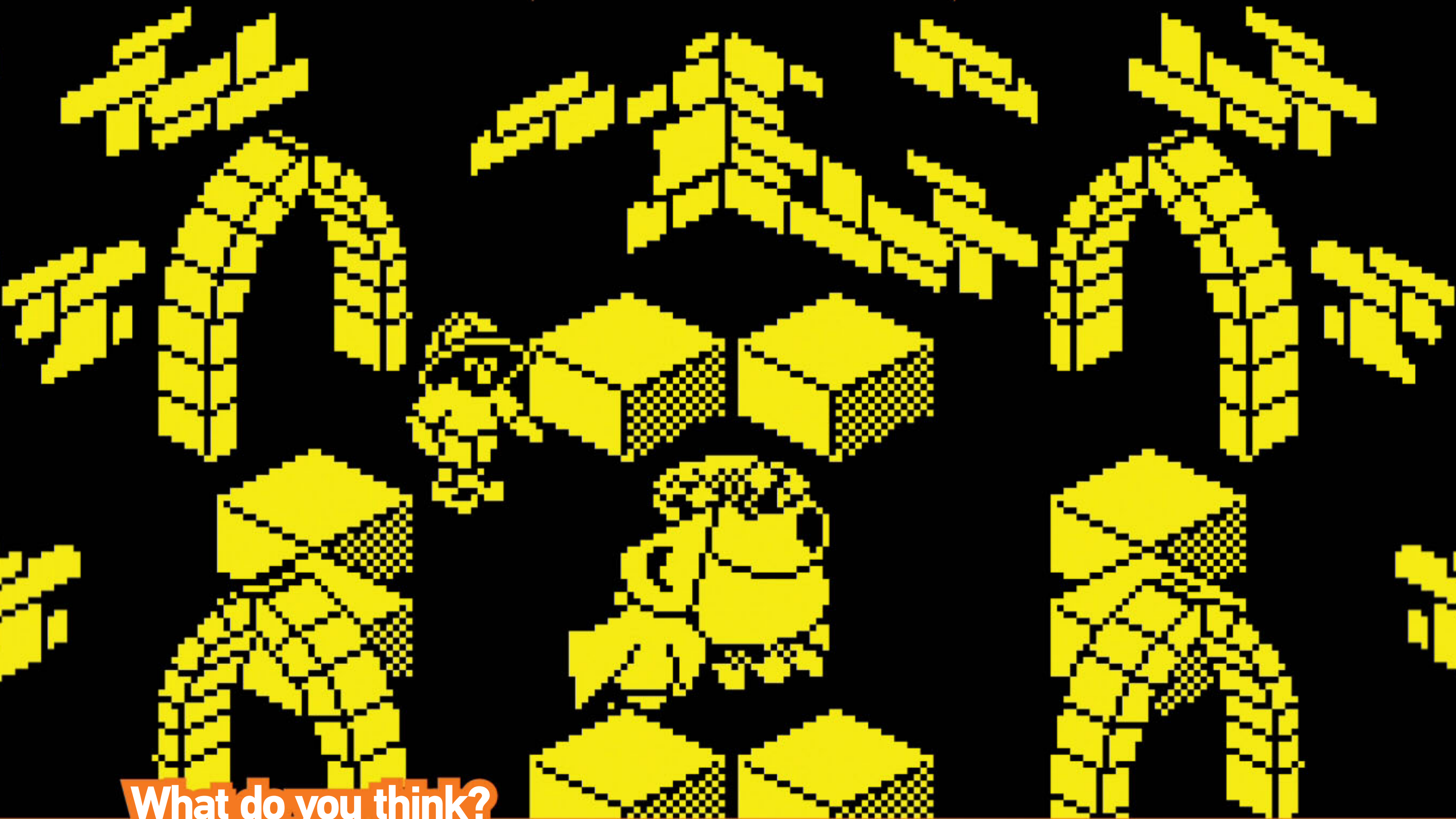
I have this theory. You remember that old quote about preferring to listen to the radio because "the pictures are better"? You remember all the times you've seen a film based upon a book you loved, and it was jarring because it was somehow better in your head?

That's what I think was going on with the graphics of yore; the visuals were so sparse that all those black backdrops (unless you were a Commodore 64 owner… in which case: the dirty brown backdrops) were empty canvasses ready to be painted by our imaginations. There was something of the optical illusion about it, our highly-evolved brains automatically filling in the blanks.

Go back to *Knight Lore*. It was a revolution in graphical terms, but the graphics are incredibly simple, almost impressionistic, by today's standards. Black space was used to suggest more than was there. The artists at Ultimate might not have drawn every cracked, dusty brick, or every single cobweb, but I knew they were there… in the shadows.

And this is the other part of my theory: that when it came to the games we played back in the Eighties, because of this phenomenon, I think we all had subtly different experiences. Because so much was reliant on each individual gamer's imagination, and each of us have a different imagination, we each had a different subjective experience. Nowadays, all the hard work is done for you. Graphics are so detailed that our imagination doesn't even get a look-in.

We were the generation that got lucky. Evolution will speak: the rate that graphics are getting more realistic, our descendants' imagination glands will be about as much use to them as a vestigial tail. ✱



What do you think?

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag darran.jones@futurenet.com



Philip and Andrew Oliver

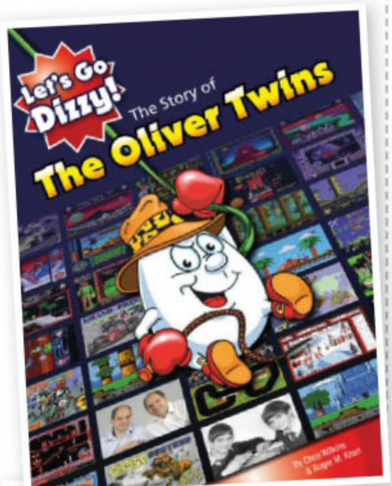
The brothers reveal the story behind Let's Go Dizzy, a brand-new book about their careers

How did the book come about?
PO: Chris Wilkins, the publisher, lives locally and is passionate about retro. We first met him when he organised a retro game event near Leamington over ten years ago. We discovered he'd also produced a retro gaming magazine, called *Retro Fusion*. Times change, and with the advent of Kickstarter Chris turned his hand to books and has produced many titles on 8-bit games. He told us there had been a lot of interest in a *Dizzy* book, but we were quick to point out to him that we'd want to cover all the games we wrote. Excited by the idea, Chris set up a Kickstarter campaign. We suggested a 'kick off' event at The History Of Computing Museum in Cambridge that we'd visited the year before. Over 500 people pledged, taking it past its funding goal of £20,000.

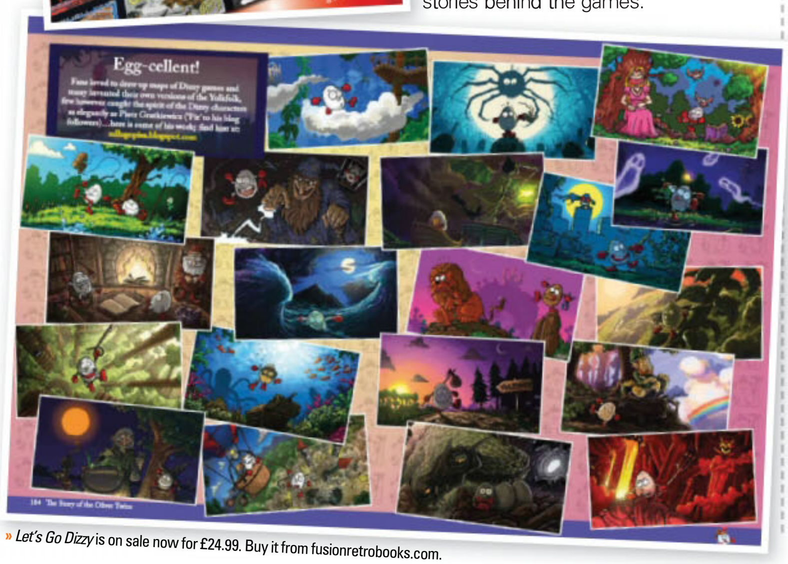


» The behind the scenes access in *Let's Go Dizzy* is sublime and worth the price of entry alone.

Are we right in thinking it features a lot of never-before-seen content?
AO: We've always done our best to keep everything, hoping that one day someone would be interested. Of course, keeping everything for so long did mean it was all a mess and took a great deal of time sorting it all out. However, in doing so we found so much stuff that we've not seen for years, quite a lot that we'd forgotten about. So not only does it have a lot of new 'old' material – it's been excellently-presented and Roger [Kean] has done a brilliant job of organising it all and adding a great narrative thread to weave it all together.



What's it been like revisiting your past games?
AO: There are many things that we have created that we were really proud of, some of which were sadly never released, so it was great to be able to show some of the material. And, as anyone that has ever met us will tell you, we love telling the entertaining stories behind the games.



» *Let's Go Dizzy* is on sale now for £24.99. Buy it from fusionretrobooks.com.



» Philip and Andrew take time out from *SkySaga* to sign some books.

> "It shows how much dedication is required in making games, as it's not an easy career choice"
> Andrew Oliver

How does it feel finally airing what really happened between you and Codemasters?
PO: As the book shows, there are always plenty of ups and downs in business, especially when people are near the start of their careers as entrepreneurs. Whenever you see stories about successful businesses, you never see the less glamorous or more controversial parts of those stories but they're always there. Like many businessmen, we've chosen not to tell some of those more controversial elements in the past but we were advised by lots of people that if this was going to be an accurate history of our careers then it was important to include all that detail now, including how our extremely successful run with Codemasters and the Darlings came to an end. We do also feel that at least now people will understand why Dizzy, a favourite game character and a British icon suddenly disappeared.



» It's great to see a book with so much Amstrad coverage in it.

What do you feel is the most interesting chapter in the book?
AO: That's tricky to answer as each section covers different things. We'd like to think the book will prove inspirational to students wanting a career in games and for them I think the early part of our story will show that you just have to keep on trying, and that success is rarely stumbled upon. But it also shows how much dedication is required in making games, as it's not an easy career choice.

How does it feel knowing there's still so much love for your games?
PO: It makes us both feel really proud – but also makes us strive to do even more. We don't want our legacy to be just about what we created at the start of our careers. We want to strive to create something far more successful than *Dizzy* and that's what we fully intend to do with *SkySaga*, and we are grateful that Smilegate has given us an amazing opportunity to do so, and we plan on showing them they were right in doing so! *

Photos © Samathy Barratt

Collecting A Bit Of Everything

Our latest reader has a firm belief that anything goes



PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
"This is a great game. I managed to get my mint copy not long before they began to rocket up in price"
PAID: £56

PIER SOLAR
"It is a Kickstarter copy with a drawing of me on the cover. You can even enter a code to change the final boss face to mine. To activate it, on title screen, hold L+R+Down for five seconds. An input box will appear. Then, enter 59-10-60-01. It should work for all versions!"
PAID: £250





SIGNED GAMES
"I have quite a few of these on my wall and wouldn't part with them for any reason"
PAID: Priceless



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

DREAMCAST
■ My most treasured thing is my Dreamcast setup with broadband adapter, as there's still a nice little community playing *Phantasy Star Online*, dare I say a growing one now we have the Dreampi.
PAID: £50

BIO

NAME: Arron Davis

ESTIMATED VALUE: Priceless

FAVOURITE SYSTEM: Master System

FAVOURITE GAME: *Final Fantasy VII*





Arron Davies never intended to be a big collector of games, it just kind of happened. "I got an Atari 2600 when I was five," the lead singer of AC/DC tribute band, Whole Lotta DC, tells us. "Being poor and a huge gamer I'd have to buy, sell and swap if I wanted anything new."

Unlike some of the collectors we've featured in past issues, Arron doesn't really have a specific goal or a system that he specialises in – he simply buys the games he loved growing up. "I don't really concentrate on any system," he tells us. "I don't really get collector completionists. I love the Dreamcast, for instance, but I don't want a shelf full American football and basketball games. I've bought a total of eight Jaguar games and as far as I'm concerned my Jag collection is complete."

That's not to say he doesn't have games that he's never managed to get around to playing, but whereas another collector (Darran, for example) might buy every game for a certain system, Arron simply revisits what he already has. "When I'm having one of those periods of thinking I don't have anything to play, or I don't feel like playing this or that or the other, I make a point of going through my collection and picking out two or three games I've never played and making an effort to get into them. It pays dividends, as you may find a hidden gem and future favourite."

So what advice would Arron give to other gamers who are interested in starting up their own collections? "Don't go into debt chasing an ideal collection," he begins, "as I don't think there is one. Also play your actual games. I hate the thought of lofts full of row after row of unplayed, and, even worse, sealed games. Games are made to be experienced, loved and even hated. Sealed games can't build memories."

Cost is something that's come up a few times, so we were keen to know if Arron collected complete games and what his partner thinks about his burgeoning collection. "I like complete games, but I won't pay top money just for a bit of cardboard," he tells us. "Atari 2600 games, for instance, I'm happy with a cartridge. Mega Drive games I prefer complete. As for my wife, she's a fellow gamer, cosplayer and collector, and I'm very jealous of her Vectrex – in short, she's fine with it." ✱



DISCUSS

Do you buy retro plug-and-play consoles?

Forum
www.retrogamer.net/forum

■ No I'm not interested. I'll either buy the original hardware, or just use emulation.
ianpmarks

■ I used to… until I realised I only ever played them once or twice then stuck them in a drawer and they were forgotten about until I had a charity shop clear out.
the_hawk

■ No. I was going to get the C64 one, but then found out there was a problem with the colours on the PAL version, so didn't bother. I have the real hardware of most of the stuff I'm interested in, and there isn't one of these plug-and-play things for the others.
necronom

■ No thank you. I've bought enough gadgets over the years that I end up not using, so I don't need any more stuff cluttering up my place.
Sokurah

■ Collected them for a while, they were fun, great to plug in for visiting kids and some were attractively packaged. But they just gathered dust.
ArchaicKoala

Twitter
Twitter.com/@RetroGamer_mag

■ There's definitely a place for them, but they don't interest me. I'd much rather have the authentic consoles, personally.
@Toadsanime

■ Sure. If they work well, the retail price often beats out the eBay price of that one game on it that I want.
@Jayextee

■ It'd be much cheaper overall to just buy the plug-and-play alternative as opposed to buying a NES and then hunting down all the games.
@heyakuku

■ Don't normally bother as they look like cheap knockoffs – I have ordered a NES Mini tho' as it's proper Ninty.
@Vyper68

■ No, it's still emulating games and emulation does not give the same feeling like the 'real thing' does.
@djkoelkast

■ We're not all so technically minded as to mess around with different emulators so plug-and-play is a great option.
@jon_weir

Facebook
facebook.com/RetroGamerUK

■ Thanks, but no thanks. Even my microwave oven can run NES/Atari/Genesis ROMs.
Rafael Hoyos Weht

■ I think it's a great middle ground between emulation and original hardware. Personally, I do not have enough space or income to be collecting for these original systems.
Matt Willey

■ I don't like buying these systems for one reason: lack of expansion. Once you have played your 30 games, that's it.
Chris Legg

■ The Classic Mini will be my first. Maybe I'm just snooty but it's easier for me to get excited about a device actually made by the hardware manufacturer.
Gary W Hodges

■ Have preordered the Classic Mini, as I only got into Nintendo when the N64 was released.
Anthony Bull

■ I think it is a good idea to support these efforts – especially the NES Mini and Spectrum Vega. They offer a great selection of games at a reasonable price.
Ricky Healy



What We Think

■ We like these devices, especially if they bring down the cost of playing desirable games, but like many of you we share concerns over accuracy, build quality and lack of expandability. We're hoping that Nintendo's entry into the market will inspire other manufacturers to respond with even better products.

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



The Goonies

"IN THIRD GRADE, I CHEATED ON MY HISTORY EXAM..."

#109

» **KONAMI** » **FAMICOM** » **1986**

Based on the now-classic kids movie, *The Goonies* was one of Konami's first shots with a licensed property. And it's good! Although very little of it has to do with the movie.

The player guides main-character Mikey through six stages, starting with the abandoned Fratelli's hideout from the film, then moving into the drainage system, then into the caves, and finally onto the pirate ship. Your goal in each stage is to get bombs from enemies to use on doors, either freeing your Goonie friends or retrieving one of three keys to unlock the next level.

Enemies include either the odd rat or fox, the Fratelli brothers, skeletons, and the dreaded pirate One Eyed Willie himself! Mikey starts the game only able to kick enemies, but can eventually find a slingshot to attack them at a longer range.

Strangely enough, this game was never released for home video game systems in the US and Europe, possibly due to a rights issue with the Cindy Lauper theme song, which plays throughout the game. The only way to play this was on Nintendo PlayChoice-10 arcade cabinets, or on Nintendo VS. System arcade machines. The sequel, *Goonies II*, was released for home consoles world-wide. This game was also ported to the PC-88 and Sharp X-1 home computers in Japan.

ZACH MCCUE



THE LEGACY OF RESIDENT



EVIL

IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN PATIENT ZERO IN THE HORROR EPIDEMIC, BUT RESI SUCCESSFULLY MUTATED THE GENRE INTO THE TEMPLATE WE KNOW NOW. NICK THORPE SPEAKS TO HORROR DEVELOPERS TO ASSESS THE SCALE OF RESI'S SPREAD ACROSS THE GAMING WORLD...

MASTERS OF HORROR

The developers we spoke to…



MASACHIKA KAWATA
Producer, **Capcom**



CORY DAVIS
Cocreative director, **Tangentlemen**



THOMAS GRIP
Creative director, **Frictional Games**



WRIGHT BAGWELL
CEO, **Outpost Games**



SAM BARLOW
Independent videogame director

There's a famous saying which states that there are only two certainties in life, and while death and taxes are both inevitable, we're convinced that there's at least one certainty too few accounted for. You see, there's always a pedant out there ready to pop up when you least desire it, and we're about to lure them all out of hiding with the following statement: *Resident Evil* defined survival horror. "But **RG**," they cry, "there were horror games before *Resident Evil*! And really, didn't it just do a lot of what *Alone In The Dark* did?"

They key difference is in that little term 'survival horror' – nobody was using that before 1996, but it was the single descriptive phrase Capcom would return to. Upon loading *Resident Evil*, you'd be informed that, "You have once again entered the world of survival horror." Go back and take a look at the front cover of *Biohazard* (*Resident Evil*'s Japanese name) for the PlayStation, and the words 'survival horror' are right there on the cover. So the term survival horror is very much a *Resident Evil* invention – and within just a few years, the entire genre was being called by the name Capcom had given it. So while *Resident Evil* didn't invent survival horror, the series most definitely defined it and inspired a whole host of imitators.

Yet survival horror doesn't necessarily define *Resident Evil*. The series managed to reinvent itself so drastically with *Resident Evil 4* as to be considered



» [PlayStation] Secondary protagonist Barry Burton is a beloved character, and emblematic of *Resident Evil*'s B-movie appeal.



» [PlayStation] This ominous shot shows crows perched, waiting for you to fail at this room's puzzle.

more of an action game, and that game's influence has been primarily felt in this genre. So when we talk about the legacy of *Resident Evil* here, we're talking about the first age of its design – fixed camera angles, tank controls, limited inventory and all.

As is commonly known today, *Resident Evil* was originally conceptualised by general producer Tokuro Fujiwara as a spiritual remake of *Sweet Home*, a Famicom RPG based on a Japanese horror film, to be directed by Shinji Mikami. That game had included many elements that would later make it into *Resident Evil* – the mansion setting, supernatural enemies, a heavy emphasis on puzzle solving and inventory management, the gradual revelation of the game's plot via diary entries and other notes, and even the opening door scene that serves to transition between rooms. Despite this, the original plans for *Resident Evil* didn't have a tremendous amount in common with the final game. Initially, the game could be played co-operatively, and the cast was comprised of cyborg protagonists, including the hulking Gelzer and diminutive Dewey as well as the eventual protagonists.

Realising that you wouldn't feel much of a sense of fear for cyborgs, especially given the original plan for a lone mastermind as the antagonist, writer Kenichi Iwao rewrote the game's scenario. What he came up with was the concept of a mansion in a remote forest, which has recently been the site of ▶

CORY DAVIS

Here They Lie's codirector on the impact and reach of Capcom's masterpiece



When did you first encounter the original *Resident Evil*, and what impression did it make?
Resident Evil came out when I was a sophomore in high school, and I remember it having a big impact on me. I was a huge fan of horror in general, but specifically of horror games like *Doom*, *Splatterhouse*, and *Castlevania*. *Resident Evil* felt different. Instead of a horror-themed carnival ride, the entire experience came together as a device for creating realistic tension and dread in unpredictable fight-or-flight scenarios. *Resident Evil* stuck with me when I wasn't playing it – this mechanism for creating fear… haunting me until I had the courage to jump back in for more.

What design choices heighten the feeling of dread in *Resident Evil*?
The apparent roughness in the design choices really made *Resident Evil* feel antagonistic to me as a player, and that was very attractive to me. The game mechanics themselves remind me of the way I feel in real life when presented with a frightening scenario. Even the limitations of the camera add to the heightened tension as you are constantly trying to get a better look at the threat that is coming at you.

What stands out as the most memorable moment from the first *Resident Evil* to you?
This is probably a cop out, but those damn zombie dogs got me the first time, and still get me to this day. The shocking way that they leap into the environment, and the horrifying whimper they make when you finally kill one… it all gives me the shivers.

What elements of *Resident Evil*'s design have you incorporated into your own horror games?
The oppressive feeling I felt in *Resident Evil* is something that I have pushed in some way, in nearly every game I've worked on. The scarcity of powerful weapons and ammunition can really allow you to walk the razor's edge of power fantasy, and anxiety-driven terror. Dangling a power-fantasy carrot just out of reach, and then requiring the tactical, skilled usage of scarce weaponry, ammunition, or other resources in high-tension situations is an extremely effective combo. I've always attempted to be as successful as *Resident Evil* was at creating a peaceful, unassuming lull in the combat, horror, and overall tension – just long enough to lower your defences and open you up for another round of terror.



» [PS4] *Here They Lie* is a terrifying horror game that's available in VR, much like *Resident Evil VII*.



» [PlayStation] Though primitive now, the gore and violence in *Resident Evil* was considered extreme in 1996.

> **"The design of Resident Evil is a strange brew of panic-inducing survival mechanics"**
> Cory Davis



» [PlayStation] Unusual puzzles lead to odd situations like Chris trying, and failing, to read music.

mysterious murders. The local police send in their elite S.T.A.R.S. (Special Tactics And Rescue Service) team to investigate, and after Bravo Team disappears without a trace, your job is to take control of an Alpha Team member (Chris Redfield or Jill Valentine) and find out what has happened. Taking refuge in the seemingly-abandoned mansion, the protagonists soon discover that it was secretly a scientific facility operated by the shadowy Umbrella Corporation, and is teeming with zombies and other mutated creatures.

The team's planning process might not seem particularly cohesive, and this is something that has always been questioned by fans. "The design of *Resident Evil* is a strange brew of panic-inducing survival mechanics," says Cory Davis, an accomplished designer of horror games whose work includes *F.E.A.R.*, *Condemned 2: Bloodshot* and VR gem *Here They Lie*. "There's always been a lot of debate around the 'clunkiness' of the movement, camera, shooting, and UI elements in the original design, and whether or not this was intentional."

At least some of it was definitely unplanned. The game was initially intended to be played from a first-person perspective – a feature which had numerous benefits such as a limited field of vision and intuitive movement. However, this was quickly scrapped due to the limited 3D power of the PlayStation. Instead, Capcom's designers adopted the use of polygonal characters over prerendered backdrops, a technique seen in the earlier PC title, *Alone In The Dark*. This enabled the team to use high quality models for the characters and enemies, but stuck them with a fixed perspective for each scene.

Ultimately, the camera was something that the team was able to turn to its advantage. "You have this sort of tunnel vision, and are constantly unsure what things that might lurk around," explains Thomas Grip, designer of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. "This means you start to imagine what dangers might be near and eventually you end up scaring yourself basically." Wright Bagwell, a veteran of the acclaimed *Dead Space* series, concurs: "When things get quiet and rooms feel mysteriously empty, people freak out – they expect something to happen, and keeping them in that state of tension is where the real magic of any horror game or film happens. Nothing that you put on the screen is scarier than just letting peoples' imagination run wild."



» [PlayStation] *Resident Evil* was never just about human zombies, as this mutant plant demonstrates well.

Indeed, Capcom's design for the Spencer Mansion incorporated many short hallways and winding paths specifically to hide oncoming horrors from the player, but the moans of the zombies could often be heard way before you actually encountered them. The oppressive atmosphere proved effective in sustaining tension, but needed to be broken occasionally. "People are easily desensitised to scares and can easily recognise patterns," notes Wright. The *Resident Evil* team guarded against player complacency by mixing regular sections with plentiful enemies, lengthy puzzle-solving sections and the occasional jump scare – most notably, when dogs crash through the windows of a seemingly-empty corridor. This model of pacing is something that Wright has applied in his own survival horror work: "We spent a lot of time *removing* things from the game on *Dead Space 2* so that players didn't fatigue of combat, jump scares, and other surprises."

The effective use of restraint is what made *Resident Evil* so successful. Slightly awkward controls aside, the player is given the ability to run from zombies, or fight them. Healing items are relatively plentiful, and as long as you can make it to a room with a typewriter, you can save your game. But you're subject to a number of restrictions – you can't deal any damage while you're moving, and your ammunition is limited. While you might see multiple healing herbs in a room, your limited inventory means that you can rarely carry ▶





» [PlayStation] Camera angles were expertly chosen to avoid showing the player advantageous viewpoints.

BY THE NUMBERS

We take a look at just how successful Resident Evil is

RESIDENT EVIL 1996
PLAYSTATION, DIRECTOR'S CUT, DIRECTOR'S CUT DUALSHOCK



SALES: **5.8** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 2 1998
PLAYSTATION



SALES: **5** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 3 NEMESIS 1999
PLAYSTATION



SALES: **3.5** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL CODE: VERONICA 2000
PS2, DREAMCAST



SALES: **2.2** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE 2002
GAMECUBE, PS3, XBOX 360, DL, PS4, XBOX ONE



SALES: **2.7** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO 2002
GAMECUBE



SALES: **2.5** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005
GAMECUBE, WII, PS2



SALES: **5.9** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 5 2009
PS3, XBOX 360/DL



SALES: **7.1** MILLION

RESIDENT EVIL 6 2012
PS3, XBOX 360/DL



SALES: **6.6** MILLION

* Source: Capcom Investor Relations







» [PlayStation] *Resident Evil 2* shifted the setting to the disaster-stricken streets of Raccoon City.



more than one, forcing you to leave others behind. Even your ability to save is limited by the need for Ink Ribbons. Ultimately, you're forced to eliminate only high-priority threats. "The way the game forces you to traverse the map and learn which spaces are safe or not allows you to really build up some suspense and dread," notes Sam Barlow, whose design and writing credits include *Silent Hill: Origins* and *Silent Hill: Shattered Memories*. "You have to (frequently) backtrack through narrow corridors, where you know there's a good chance of you taking a hit from a zombie you left behind."

The use of zombies as a primary enemy proved to be a great fit for this gameplay template. They're slow enough to avoid, but resilient and dangerous in groups or tight spaces. "They're somewhat predictable and understandable… so it's easy to weigh the odds and feel them tip against you," notes Sam. "Zombies aren't about the primal dread of some horror, but tap into a rising panic that works well with videogame mechanics." For Thomas, the zombies also represent a smart technological choice. "Creatures like zombies are also very good for AI," he notes. "It makes sense for them to just stand around in a location staring into a wall, if they bump into objects as they try to pathfind towards the player it is just part of who they are and so on."

> "Seeing it for the first time, I thought how amazing and polished it looked"
> Masachika Kawata

This what sets *Resident Evil*'s survival horror template apart from other horror-themed games. With more flexible controls, plentiful ammunition and an unlimited inventory, the game would be a power fantasy. However, *Resident Evil* forces the player to cope with strict limitations – you don't want or even try to eliminate every threat, but instead try to make smart use of the resources you have to make it out of your predicament alive.



» [PlayStation] *Resident Evil 3* kept the urban setting and ramped up the action, adding explosive barrels and better weapons.

I wasn't working on the series when the first game came out, but I was working on something else at the time and I distinctly remember the first time I ever saw *Resident Evil*," remembers Masachika Kawata, now a veteran of the series who is currently producer on *Resident Evil VII*. "The bug check QA period for my title and *Resident Evil* were aligned at the same time – and back in those days we didn't have staff that did QA specifically. The dev team just had to do all the bug-checking themselves," he explains. "When I was doing the bug-check on my game I saw the guy next to me was playing what I later knew was *Resident Evil*. Seeing it for the first time, I just thought how amazing and polished it looked, so even though it was before the game came out, that was my very first memory of the series."

THE ORIGINS OF SURVIVAL HORROR

Capcom's game certainly refined the genre, but wasn't necessarily the first game to introduce the genre's key tropes…





Despite impressing their colleagues, the *Resident Evil* team wasn't convinced that the game would do well, with the game pencilled in for sales of around 200,000. If the game had any major weakness other than an unproven market for horror games, it was the game's incorporation of human actors. The opening video sequence and overall voice acting carried a heavy B-movie flavour, with some toe-curling dialogue delivered with enough ham to stock the nation's deli counters twice over. It ultimately didn't matter – critical acclaim was widespread and the game went on to sell 2.75 million copies, making it the company's biggest hit since *Street Fighter II*. The game would achieve further success on the PC and Saturn, before being updated on PlayStation in a *Director's Cut* release and a further DualShock-enabled release that achieved over 2.3 million sales combined.

"So there weren't really many horror games back then, so this was maybe the very first game that you could say was truly scary," says Kawata, explaining the success of the game. "But it also combined these horror features with good, deep, entertaining gameplay and on top of that the game used the then cutting-edge capabilities of the PlayStation to the fullest. So it wasn't a title that had one gimmick and the other features were falling by the wayside – it really hit all those marks so successfully with horror, gameplay and technological prowess. That was such a great combination which made a perfect storm for capturing the minds of gamers back in 1996."



» The movie series, while based on the games, has carved a narrative for itself, setting itself apart from its source material.

HOUSE OF HORRORS

As one of the most iconic locations in videogames, the Spencer Mansion holds some truly memorable moments…

SAFE ROOM
PIANO ROOM
DINING ROOM
MAIN HALL
GROUND FLOOR
LARGE GALLERY
SAFE ROOM
MIRROR ROOM
GALLERY
TAXIDERMY ROOM
LIBRARY
FIRST FLOOR
MAIN HALL
SMALL LIBRARY
BEDROOM
ARMOUR ROOM
ATTIC

REMEMBER TO BRING SOME WEED KILLER

I HOPE THIS ISN'T CHRIS' BLOOD

DON'T OPEN THAT DOOR! YOU'RE A FOOL IF YOU DARE!

WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?

REMEMBER: EYE OF THE TIGER

SNAKES, WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES...



MEDICAL ROOM

■ This room is a safe one – in fact, it's so safe that this is where you'll meet Bravo Team survivor Rebecca Chambers, if you're playing as Chris. She's a key ally in your fight against the biological horrors you face in the mansion.



CEILING ROOM

■ You can grab a shotgun in the room next door to this one. However, you can't just pluck it off the wall – unless you replace it with a broken shotgun, this room's ceiling trap will activate. Don't become a Jill Sandwich…



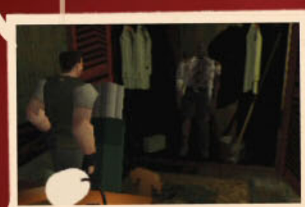
L-SHAPED HALLWAY

■ There doesn't seem to be too much going on in this quiet corridor. But as you walk down it, ferocious hell hounds come crashing through the windows, eager for a bite of Redfield rump or Valentine thigh!



TEA ROOM

■ Here's where you first meet one of the mansion's inhabitants, who appears to be tending to one of your fallen comrades. Oh, never mind – he's feasting on the poor victim's innards. Get your weapon ready!



KEEPER'S BEDROOM

■ The groundskeeper used to live here, but now he's undead, and he will ambush you from the wardrobe as you read his diary! Of course, the real horror comes when you get to read his account of zombification. Itchy. Tasty.



ATTIC

■ We've seen some horrifying things in attics – water-damaged games, dead pigeons, you name it – but we've never come across a gigantic snake. This creature, known as Yawn, serves as the first boss of the game.

DINING ROOM BALCONY

■ This balcony seems safe from below. When you actually arrive there, though, you'll find zombies ready and waiting for you. If you push the statue here onto the floor below, you'll find a blue gem that's crucial to solving a tiger statue puzzle!



BALCONY

■ Here's where you'll find the corpse of Bravo Team's Forest Speyer, pecked to death by crows. His discovery is just a grisly moment in the original game, but in every version since then, he'll revive as a zombie and attempt to attack you.







» [PS4] Though dark, *Resident Evil's* remade visuals were astonishing – little polish was needed to put them on modern consoles.

Resident Evil's sales were great enough that Capcom immediately moved into full production of a series, adding new variations on the original theme. *Resident Evil 2* attempted to inject a further sense of vulnerability into proceedings, casting you as a rookie cop (Leon Kennedy) or college student (Claire Redfield) in the virus-infested Raccoon City with no obvious support. Additionally, the game took place across two different scenarios and your actions in one could affect your play with the other character – for example, if Claire grabs the submachine gun in her A scenario, Leon won't be able to take it when he visits the same room in his B scenario. Despite a troubled production in which the whole project was restarted late in development, the game shifted 4.96 million copies when released in 1998, and is arguably the most beloved of the classic games.

By this point, *Resident Evil* had effectively popularised survival horror games and other developers were keen to jump on the bandwagon. Indeed, the dominance of *Resident Evil* "was hugely problematic for the development of the genre moving forward", according to Sam. Early efforts had their own style, but the market soon shifted towards outright clones – the 1998 Saturn game *Deep Fear* is effectively *Resident Evil* underwater, and *Countdown: Vampires* is *Resident Evil* but with (you guessed it) vampires. Of the earlier efforts, *Clock Tower* retains a cult appeal due to its 16-bit heritage and point-and-click gameplay, and Squaresoft's *Parasite Eve* successfully blended survival horror with action-RPG mechanics.

1999 proved to be the year in which competition within the genre really heated up. While the fully-3D Dreamcast game *Blue Stinger* wouldn't provide much to worry Capcom, Konami's PlayStation game *Silent Hill* was much more successful in adopting real-time 3D graphics. The psychological horror of the game was a marked departure from the B-movie themes of other games, *Resident Evil* included, and the game was well-received and successful, kicking off a long-running series. Capcom was also taking a bite out of its own market with another real-time 3D survival horror, *Dino Crisis*. The initial game stayed close to the *Resident Evil* formula but provided some terrifyingly quick enemies, allowing the protagonist more mobility to compensate. The game sold over 2 million copies and spawned a series of its own, though the sequels were more regular action games.



» [PS3] *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* shifted the series to full-3D environments for the first time ever.

> "There weren't many horror games back then, so this was maybe the first game that you could say was truly scary"
> Masachika Kawata

Capcom wasn't content to leave the market to pretenders, though, and developed the next two games in the *Resident Evil* series in tandem. The final entry in the original PlayStation trilogy was 1999's *Resident Evil 3*, featuring Jill Valentine's turn to escape from the doomed Raccoon City. This time, the twist was the addition of a smart and persistent enemy named Nemesis, which hunts you down over the course of the game. Capcom also tweaked the movement controls a little in order to better accommodate increased levels of action, adding a 180-degree turn move for quick escapes. Despite a shorter story and no option to choose between protagonists, the game was another critical and commercial success, shifting 3.5 million copies.



» [PS4] The 2002 remake of *Resident Evil* added new enemies, wrong-footing even series veterans.

On the Dreamcast, *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* teamed up Claire Redfield, her brother Chris and prisoner Steve Burnside in an attempt to escape from the Umbrella-controlled Rockfort Island. For the first time in the series, environments were rendered in real-time, allowing for some camera movement (although this was still predetermined) and the addition of first-person firing for some weapons. Between its Dreamcast debut in 2000 and the PS2 conversion in 2001, the game sold over 2.5 million copies.

The last two classic *Resident Evil* adventures were released for the GameCube, the platform Capcom had already chosen for *Resident Evil 4*, as part of plans to consolidate the whole series onto a single platform. The first of these was a modern remake of the

BACK TO BASICS

How Resident Evil VII is looking to the franchise's past to reshape its future



MANSION OF MADNESS

■ The vast majority of *Resident Evil VII* takes place in an old plantation mansion, which belongs to the Baker family. *Resident Evil VII: Beginning Hour*, Capcom's demo for its new game, has demonstrated that the tension that came from exploring the original Spencer mansion hasn't been forgotten.



SIMPLE, BUT EFFECTIVE PUZZLES

■ The aforementioned demo also gives a good insight into some of the simple, but undeniably effective puzzles that will be frequent in the final game. A videotape being used to ingenious effect to show a hidden room in the building is just one example of the clever puzzles that lie in store for you in the final game.



EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

■ *Resident Evil* was just as much about exploring your surroundings as it was avoiding its denizens. If *Beginning Hour* is anything to go by, it would appear that Capcom has been able to maintain that balance for *Resident Evil VII* – enabling you to examine various objects in your inventory and vicinity.



AN UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

■ The Nemesis was a truly unstoppable force of nature from Capcom's third *Resident Evil* game, which would turn up at inopportune moments and wreak havoc on the poor player. Capcom mirrors this in *Resident Evil VII*, but it's now members of the Baker family who show up to terrorise you.



▶ original *Resident Evil*, created because the team believed that the game's visuals and localisation had aged poorly. The results were stunning – as well as a visual upgrade, the game kept series veterans on their toes with areas that had been cut from the original game, as well as the introduction of the dangerous Crimson Head zombies that mutated from any regular zombies killed early in the game. Despite the high quality, sales of 1.35 million was a disappointment.

Resident Evil Zero was originally announced for the N64, but moved to the Gamecube due to development issues resulting from the older console's memory limitations. This prequel followed Rebecca Chambers of the original game and escaped convict Billy Coen as they attempted to survive an outbreak of T-Virus infected leeches unleashed by the creator of the virus, James Marcus. The game implemented a new "partner zapping" system, allowing the player to switch between the dual protagonists at will. *Resident Evil Zero* launched in 2003 and retained the amazing visual quality of the GameCube *Resident Evil* remake, but also achieved a similarly-disappointing 1.25 million sales due to the Nintendo platform's weak adoption and the general feeling that *Resident Evil Zero* was ultimately more of the same from the genre.



» [PS4] Who would have thought that a full bath would be hiding an ugly zombie? Stab it in the head before it can pull you in.

> "The Resident Evil games were artfully-constructed puzzle boxes"
> Sam Barlow

By this point, even series that predated *Resident Evil* had adopted its conventions – 2001's *Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare* and 2002's *Clock Tower 3* were now closer to Capcom's series than their own origins. Capcom was aware that the series was in need of revitalisation, if not the entire genre. Despite the ongoing success of *Resident Evil*, the company spared no effort to make sure that *Resident Evil 4* would achieve that, scrapping multiple attempts before hitting upon a radical revision of the formula that ditched the zombies and Raccoon City for a more action-oriented style of game set in rural Spain. The game was an enormous critical and commercial success, but one which moved far away from the original survival horror template. The game created a legacy all of its own, one which further *Resident Evil* sequels have followed.

But while *Resident Evil* left survival horror behind, appetite for the genre remained. It fell to a different generation of developers to drive the genre forward, and each has had a different approach. For Sam, *Silent Hill* has differentiated itself through tone. "*Silent Hill* games are never about the mechanics, whereas the classic *Resident Evil* games were artfully-constructed puzzle boxes," he notes. "*Silent Hill* games are messy and should lack resolution – they should plant themselves in your head and never let go. Whereas a *Resident Evil* game is something you can solve and win. The characters in *Resident Evil* are ciphers and fantasy costumes, whereas the people in *Silent Hill* are real and it's their stories that are the point of the whole thing." Additionally, the team at Climax was deliberately trying to break the mould. "We tried – as best we could – to try and tear up the rule book with *Shattered Memories* and were, perhaps not explicitly, but at least implicitly trying to *not* incorporate elements from *Resident Evil*."



FEELING LIMITED

■ The limited ammo found in the earlier games meant that every shot counted. Fleeing over fighting was always recommended in most scenarios, and ensured you had a good chance of surviving encounters. We've been terrified to discover that ammo has, once again, become a precious commodity.



THRILLS AND SPILLS

■ The original *Resident Evil* was famed for its 'shit your pants' moments, whether it was getting scared from dogs jumping through windows or being terrorised by cantankerous crows. True to form, *Resident Evil VII* is offering similar jump scares, more so if you're brave (or silly) enough to play it in virtual reality.



JUGGLING INVENTORY

■ Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield were constantly juggling items in the first game due to their limited carrying capacities. A similar system is employed in *Resident Evil VII*, so don't assume you can simply walk around the Bakers' mansion and fill your boots with goodies. You'll just end up disappointed.



» [PS4] *Resident Evil Zero* was good, but formulaic, highlighting the need for Capcom to rethink its own approach to horror.



» [PS4] *Resident Evil Zero*'s train makes perfect sense as an infection site – lots of people and nowhere to run.

Sam recalls. "It felt wrong that such a specific template had become the dominant form for horror games."

That motivation to move away from the norm also drove the *Dead Space* series. "Glen Schofield really wanted to prove that his team was capable of succeeding at doing something risky at a company that hated taking risks," Wright recalls. "The goal was to make a game that didn't have to root you in place when shooting to make combat elicit panic and fear, so I think that the game felt a bit more familiar to those who play shooters," he continues. "The team did an incredible job at that. There were sceptics that thought it couldn't be done, and it was one of those great moments when it felt so good to prove old assumptions wrong." Not only did *Dead Space* become one of the most highly-acclaimed horror games of the generation, it spawned successful sequels and spin-offs, making its own mark.

However, for a designer further removed from the influence of the original games, avoiding comparison with a titan of the genre is not so much of a concern. "While *RE* was really influential, I am not sure I see there being any issues with escaping its shadow. There are so many simple things that one can do to be different," Thomas asserts. "If you keep the things that drive the game at a holistic level, such as the mixture of action and puzzles, or how encounters are setup, I do not think that many people will feel it is too *Resident Evil*-like."

It's now Capcom that is looking back to the early *Resident Evil* era for inspiration. "It's hard to work on a series in Japan because there's so much expectation that builds up over time, but you also have these big turning points where you realise that you have to make a change in order to make the series continue," notes Kawata, who believes that *Resident Evil VII* will be one of those major turning points. "The big change from recent entries is definitely that we're taking it away from the action that was becoming prominent with the later games and re-establishing a focus on fear as a key concept of the game." Indeed, like some kind of biological mutation, *Resident Evil* is now feeding off the imitators it spawned – the first-person perspective that has become common in other horror games is now a key part of *Resident Evil VII*, as is VR technology.

Ultimately, the horror of *Resident Evil* and its successors comes down to you – it's your reaction that matters. "Horror works best when you can empathise with the characters. The key is that you have to relate to them, and they have to be experiencing resource constraints that make them feel out of control," says Wright. This is something that Kawata also believes, and has tried to convey in the latest *Resident Evil*. "Something that can obstruct the player's ability to feel fear for the characters [is] if they feel they can handle the situation, but now you are a ordinary person in an extraordinary situation and it's not a given that they're going to be able to get through this in one piece."

So remember: when you're in an eerie corridor where you're sure that something is lurking in the shadows, you're in desperate need of healing and you're stuck with only a practically useless knife to fight off enemies, it doesn't matter how you're viewing the action or whether you're fighting aliens, dinosaurs or even zombies. What matters is that you're scared – and *Resident Evil* provided decades of inspiration for just those sorts of scares. ★

Space Harrier

» DEVELOPER: Sega **» YEAR:** 1985 **» COST TODAY:** £600+

Yu Suzuki doesn't do things by half measures. When he has an idea for a videogame, he commits to it and he does everything he can to ensure that his vision becomes reality. Look at the recent resurrection of *Shenmue III* if you need any proof of his drive and commitment.

When Suzuki conceived *Space Harrier* in 1985, he created it from the very finest components – which included a main CPU featuring two MC6800s running at 10MHz, and a Z80 for audio that ran at 4MHz. He built on the 'Super Scalar' technology that had first featured in *Hang On* and ended up naming the actual arcade board after his game. It was a beast of a board, capable of performing incredible feats of graphical trickery, so it stands to reason that the cabinet that housed all that power needed to be just as impressive.

And impressive *Space Harrier* most certainly is. Realising that standing is for chumps, Suzuki and his team created an elaborately-complicated, sit-down hydraulic cabinet that threw the player about with gleeful abandonment as they shot down hordes of enemies, while the game's glorious soundtrack boomed out of its strategically-placed speakers. It was an epic experience in 1985 and remains just as thrilling today. As we said, Yu Suzuki doesn't do things by half measures…





STANDOUT MOMENT **Dragon Riding**



While virtually every boss encounter in *Space Harrier* is a memorable experience, one of the best parts of the game happens upon completing its fourth stage. After dispensing with a group of mechs there's a change in music and you're instantly transported into *Space Harrier*'s fantastic bonus stage. The Harrier jumps onto the back of a furry dragon (Yu Suzuki got the idea from *The Neverending Story*) and uses it to smash down as many trees as possible. A terrible idea today, from an ecological standpoint, but absolutely thrilling in 1985.



Space Harrier fact

■ In addition to the stunning hydraulic cab that's the focus of our spread, Sega also released a static sit-down deluxe cabinet of *Space Harrier*, as well as a basic upright version.

THE MAKING OF E.T. THE EXTRA TERRESTRIAL

Many say E.T. is the worst game ever, despite not playing it. Rory Milne asks Howard Scott Warshaw how he achieved the impossible by developing the game in just five weeks



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI INC.
» **DEVELOPER:** HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW
» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PLATFORM:** ATARI 2600
» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

By the spring of 1982, Atari coder Howard Scott Warshaw could certainly claim to be having a pretty good year. His debut title – *Yars' Revenge* – was a huge hit, and his high-profile follow-up – *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* – was nearing completion. Meanwhile, Atari was securing a costly rights deal for Steven Spielberg's latest creation – *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*. But, as Howard explains, there were ulterior motives in play. "At the time, they were just negotiating with Spielberg, but I knew it was coming – as early as two months previously I was talking with some of the executives there. It took a long time to nail down. They weren't just getting the rights to *E.T.*. They paid all that money to get [Spielberg] to move to Warner Brothers Studios, using Atari as a hook. Things went from *Raiders*, and now *E.T.* was an entree to get them a window to try and pull Spielberg over to Warner, which was the real coup."



» [Atari 2600] Deep down a well, E.T. finds a component he needs to build a communication device.

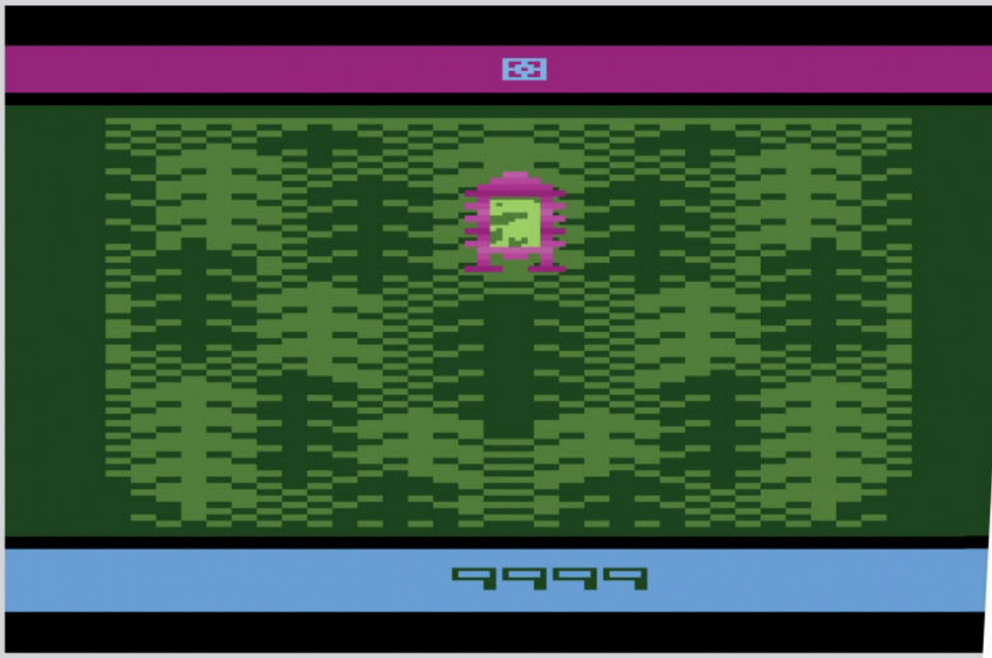
When talks to obtain the licence culminated, the in-demand director made a request for Howard to develop the game, which the developer puts down to a mutual appreciation formed during the creation of Atari's *Raiders* title."Spielberg and I got along very well because we were both very creative people. So when Atari finally got the *E.T.* rights on July 27th, Spielberg asked for me to do it. [Ray Kassar] gave me a call from the negotiating room. He said, 'We need *E.T.* for 1 September,' which was exactly five weeks [away], 'Can you do it?' And I just told him, 'Absolutely, I can.'' This was Tuesday, late afternoon. He said, 'Thursday morning at 8am there will be a Lear Jet waiting in San Jose Airport. Be on it. You're going to fly down to LA and present the design to Spielberg.' So I had 36 hours to design the game. When I presented the design to Spielberg, he looked it over and said, 'Gee, couldn't you do something a little more like *Pac-Man*?' I couldn't believe that one of the most innovative filmmakers of our time wanted me to do a knockoff. But I thought, 'Howard, dig yourself, man. This is Steven Spielberg!' So I just said, 'Well, *E.T.* is a breakthrough movie; it deserves a breakthrough game, something unique. Also, this is the game I can do in the schedule we have.' And he just said, 'Okay, that's fine.' When I got back to Sunnyvale there was a department meeting. A lot of people were saying, 'Howard gets all the big games! What's up with that?' So I stood up and said, 'This game is due 1 September. Anybody who wants this game just say so – you can have it.' There was silence. It was hubris, but there was no question in my mind that I was going to complete it."

But given that a typical Atari 2600 game took six months to develop, Howard's commitment to complete *E.T.* in just five weeks meant that he soon faced the choice of living at work or working at home.









» [Atari 2600] E.T.'s voyage to Earth sees the young alien's spacecraft land in secluded woodland.



"I had one of the techs from Atari come to my home and put together a development system"
Howard Scott Warshaw

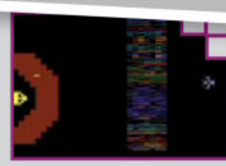
"After a few days on the project, I realised that the home and the work stuff was going to be tough to deal with. So I had one of the techs from Atari come to my home and put together a development system. It was probably the hardest five weeks I've ever worked. The way I structured the approach was through design. You don't take a game that's going to take six months and try to do that; you design a game that you can create in five weeks. So I picked simple mechanics that allowed you to generate a large game space and a fresh puzzle each time. By keeping the rules simple it made it easier to implement [everything]. But that wasn't enough, because I also felt that I had to innovate. So I set *E.T.* on a 3D world."



» [Atari 2600] A government scientist abducts E.T. and takes him to the Institute Of Science for analysis.

This ambitious plan would be achieved by digging wells in a series of top-down landscapes that would be depicted side-on when entered, and although these – and other aspects of *E.T.*'s design – satisfied Howard and his strict deadline, with hindsight he concedes a miscalculation. "The point of the wells was to create a treasure hunt. So the phone is the treasure – broken into three pieces so there's more to do. Then you need a place to hide the treasure, that's where the wells come in. The wells introduced another dynamic – getting in or out – and the idea that E.T. can fly. Then you need antagonists. So that's where the scientist and FBI agent come in. Once you have the phone, you still have to call your buddies to pick you up and then arrange to meet them discretely at the landing zone. Some of these things could have been tuned and tweaked so they were easier to deal with and made a little more sense, but that's time I really didn't have. When you get out of the wells and fall back in I thought of that as challenging gameplay. But most people just interpreted it as a pain in the ass."

Further innovations followed, as Howard decided to forego a then traditional timer to limit *E.T.*'s game times and instead develop a replenishable energy mechanic for his game. "A timer just runs, but E.T.'s energy consumption varies depending on how you play. If you just stand there you're not losing energy, and you lose more energy when you fly or run than when you're just walking. So the energy was tweaked so that there's a way to optimise your play. I felt that this was another thing that gave the game depth. This was also ▶



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

YARS' REVENGE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

BOX OFFICE TO BYTES

Other pioneering videogame film licences to try



TRON: DEADLY DISCS

■ Inspired by the movie's disc-throwing deathmatches, Mattel's tense arena title pits Tron against warriors whose discs can weaken and ultimately kill him. Tron can take out most opponents with a single disc, however, and restore his health by levelling-up.



ALIEN

■ *Star Raiders* developer Doug Neubauer played it safe when he adapted this sci-fi horror flick; the game is based on *Pac-Man*, however Doug's tweaks to Namco's coin-op do the *Alien* licence justice, and roasting aliens with a flamethrower never gets old.

EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

■ Given that it was created for the Atari 2600, this *Defender*-like shooter is as faithful an adaptation of the Battle Of Hoth as could be expected. The game's laser-spitting AT-ATs are seriously challenging foes, but this only makes them more satisfying to take down.



MEGA FORCE

■ Although a woeful movie, *Mega Force*'s premise suits a scrolling shoot-'em-up perfectly. The game has you defending a city from dastardly UFOs and dangerous missiles by alternating between riding and flying a weaponised motorbike.

KRULL

■ There was a *Krull* arcade game, but the Atari 2600 adaptation sticks closer to the source material. The key scenes depicted have you fighting spear-hurling warriors, scaling a giant spider's web to seek council from the web widow and storming the Black Fortress.

▶ the first time that anyone had essentially done a health bar in a videogame."

Despite the stringent timelines involved in developing *E.T.*, Howard also felt that his game should try to capture the sentimental nature of the movie it was based on. "The *E.T.* movie is an emotionally-toned drama, and it's a great one. By having great graphics and trying to make the characters interactive – either in helpful or oppositional ways – I thought I might be able to create some sort of emotional tenor in the game. The idea that you're going to use the 2600 to create a game with emotion is absurd. But I was so confident in what I was doing that I thought I could pull it off."

In terms of *E.T.*'s difficulty, Howard gauged his game's challenge at the same level as his previous titles rather than make an easy game for young fans of the movie, and he also found time to sneak in cameos of his earlier games heroes: Yar and Indiana Jones. "I never did a game that was targeted at young kids. I always pictured videogamers as teens who wanted some complexity in their entertainment and a little challenge in what they were doing. That's who I was shooting for. The Easter Eggs were just a vanity thing. [*E.T.* is] loaded with Easter eggs, none of which took very long to implement, but that was the part of the game that I did for me."

But as Howard pulled together the final strands of his videogame adaptation of *E.T.*, it was becoming clear to him that he had no time left for revisions



» [Atari 2600] Elliot will find phone components or chase away adults when E.T. calls on him for aid.

> **" It was tough to be as removed and cut off as I was "**
> Howard Scott Warshaw



» [Atari 2600] On completing each of *E.T.*'s levels there's a touching scene showing E.T. and Elliot reunited.

and that the breakneck-speed project had taken its toll. "There was no deviating; there was no room for reconceptualising. I didn't have time to do anything but what I'd planned. What was never included was rumination, evaluation and feedback cycles. There were playability things I could have made better, but I didn't have time or – by the end of the project – even the inclination to do anything else with them. I just wanted that thing to get the hell out of my face. It was extremely isolating. It was tough to be as removed and cut off as I was. By the end of it I was pretty crispy."

Howard's efforts were rewarded, however, with unqualified praise within Atari for meeting an impossible deadline and unqualified commercial success when the game was released – but months later, feelings towards the game changed. "The initial feedback I got was super kudos for delivering the game on time – something that no one believed was possible. In December and January of 1982 and 1983 respectively, I had two top-five games on the Billboard sales list – both *Raiders* and *E.T.* So by all intents and purposes it's a hit. You didn't start seeing the negative

THEY SOLD A MILLION



LASER BLAST

■ This space invasion title from the early Eighties makes a few tweaks to the established formula, starting with the fact that you play the invaders! David Crane's scrolling shooter also requires each side to charge their lasers before use, which adds strategy to proceedings.



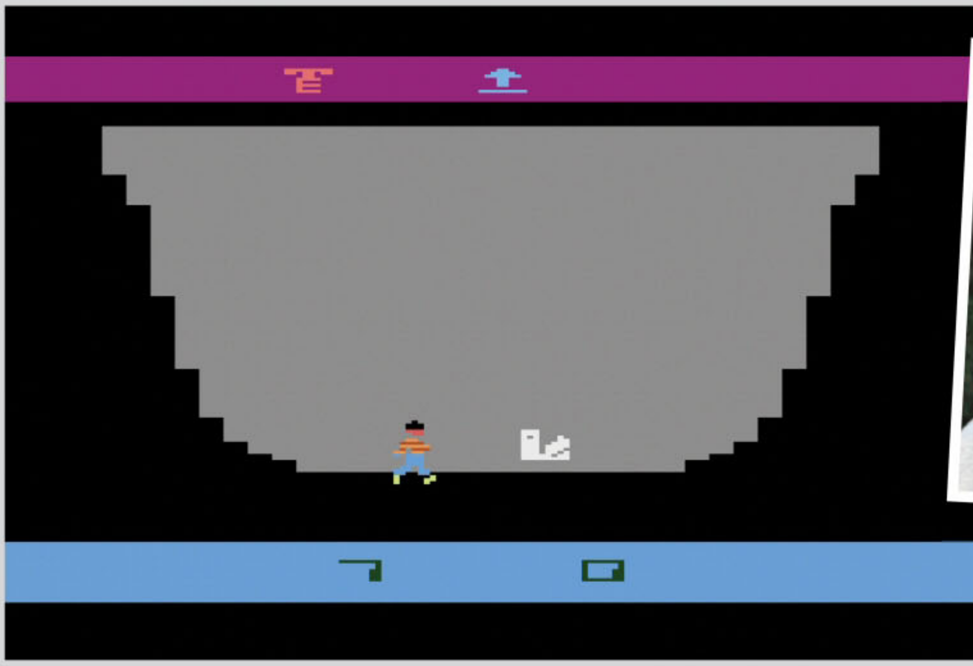
RIVER RAID

■ Carol Shaw's classic isn't a traditional shoot-'em-up as its enemy aircraft and battleships don't shoot back. They do, however, create one hell of an obstacle course! And *River Raid*'s randomly generated levels give it serious reply value that will keep you entertained for hours.

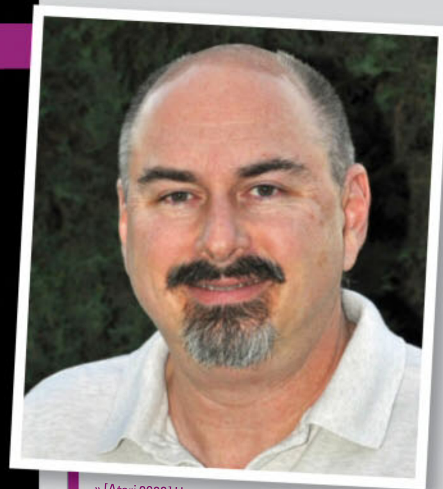


KABOOM!

■ The clue to *Kaboom!* is in its name: its all about bombs! Specifically, the objective is to catch explosives dropped by a mad bomber in a stack of buckets, but if you drop bombs you lose buckets. Although simple, *Kaboom!* delivers intensive gameplay for the humble Atari machine.



» [Atari 2600] Elliot can restore E.T.'s energy if he exhausts it, but help can only arrive three times in each game.



» [Atari 2600] Howard Scott Warshaw now works as a "Silicon Valley therapist".

feedback until later in the first quarter of 1983 when returns started to happen, because it took a while for people to play the game [and] publish reviews. And then well into 1983 there was plenty of negative feedback because Atari lost like $500 million dollars by the end of that year, [but] they only lost $22 million on *E.T.*, so it wasn't the whole problem obviously."

Then more than a decade later, a new story revised history. The tall tale it told was that *E.T.* had caused the fall of Atari Inc. and in response the firm had buried millions of copies of Howard's game in the New Mexico desert. "You've got to remember it was years before there was a mass communication medium where you could hear this kind of crap. I mean, there were stories published, but nobody really cared. It didn't become an urban myth until well into the Nineties; it was a web thing. At the time *E.T.* came out, there wasn't any concept of 'all time', it was just another game. Years later, when *E.T.* would surface as the 'worst game of all time' I found it amusing. Now, here we are, more than 30 years later, and we're still talking about it."

And so far from allowing an undeserved reputation to cloud his feelings towards *E.T.*, Howard Scott Warshaw is instead proud that he completed his game in a near-impossible timeframe, albeit that given hindsight he would refine the game's clarity and challenge. "If I were to change anything in *E.T.*, I would increase the potential for frustration and decrease the potential for disorientation. How I would do that is a much longer story. But I'm very proud of it – of that work – I'm not saying it's a great game, but I do think it's a great accomplishment." *

Many thanks to Howard for revisiting *E.T.*.



E.T. 101

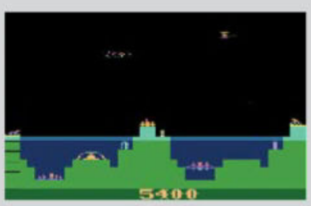
■ A combination of arcade-style action and open-world adventure, *E.T.* has straightforward gameplay built around complex mechanics. Essentially, the objective is to build a phone from three components hidden in 20 wells and then call home to get rescued. The game's challenge lies in avoiding scientists and FBI agents while maintaining E.T.'s energy.

More Atari 2600 games that sold a million copies



FREEWAY

■ Often inaccurately described as a *Frogger* clone, *Freeway* was actually developed at around the same time as Sega's venerable coin-op. Activision's title also boasts an indestructible chicken protagonist instead of a frog, and a competitive two-player mode.



ATLANTIS

■ While combining elements of Atari's *Canyon Bomber* and *Missile Command*, *Atlantis* also manages to be its own game. The Imagic bestseller gives you three fixed-angle weapons to defend a city from air attacks, which become increasingly ferocious over time.



COSMIC ARK

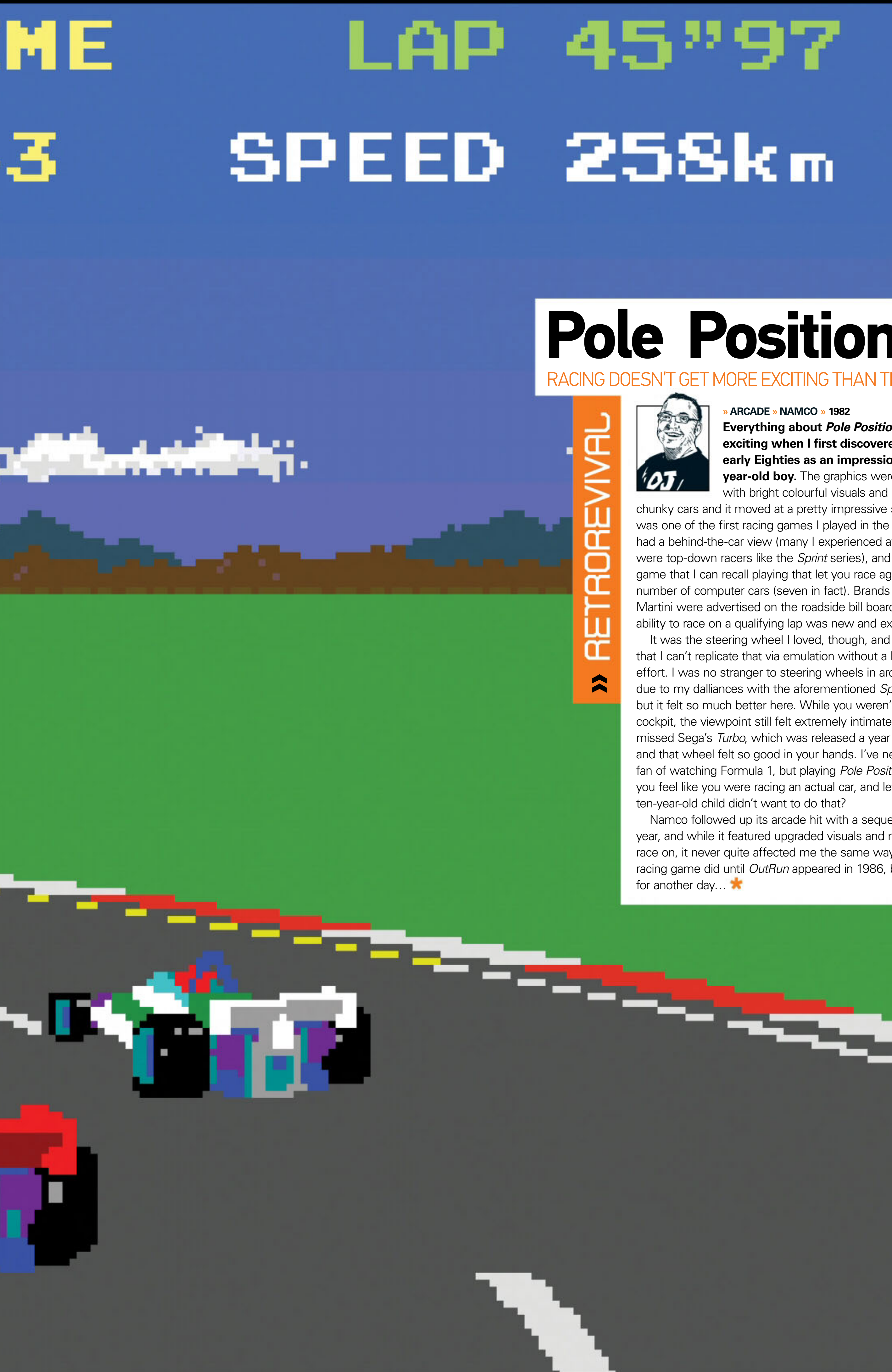
■ A game of two halves, *Cosmic Ark* alternatively challenges you to defend the eponymous Ark from meteors in deep space and to rescue beings from a planet surface while dodging lasers. The key to success lies in managing both situations without haemorrhaging fuel.








TOP 12000
SCORE 4940



Pole Position

RACING DOESN'T GET MORE EXCITING THAN THIS

» RETROREVIVAL

» **ARCADE** » **NAMCO** » **1982**

Everything about *Pole Position* felt exciting when I first discovered it in the early Eighties as an impressionable ten-year-old boy. The graphics were wonderful, with bright colourful visuals and pleasingly chunky cars and it moved at a pretty impressive speed, too. It was one of the first racing games I played in the arcades that had a behind-the-car view (many I experienced at the time were top-down racers like the *Sprint* series), and it's the first game that I can recall playing that let you race against a decent number of computer cars (seven in fact). Brands like Pepsi and Martini were advertised on the roadside bill board, while the ability to race on a qualifying lap was new and exciting.

It was the steering wheel I loved, though, and it pains me that I can't replicate that via emulation without a hell of a lot of effort. I was no stranger to steering wheels in arcade games, due to my dalliances with the aforementioned *Sprint* games, but it felt so much better here. While you weren't actually in the cockpit, the viewpoint still felt extremely intimate (I'd somehow missed Sega's *Turbo*, which was released a year earlier in 1981) and that wheel felt so good in your hands. I've never been a fan of watching Formula 1, but playing *Pole Position* really made you feel like you were racing an actual car, and let's face it, what ten-year-old child didn't want to do that?

Namco followed up its arcade hit with a sequel the following year, and while it featured upgraded visuals and more tracks to race on, it never quite affected me the same way. In fact, no racing game did until *OutRun* appeared in 1986, but that's a tale for another day… *

THE HISTORY OF MATCH DAY

Say 'football' to most Spectrum owners and they will reply with Match Day. The series saw its fair share of relegation and promotion battles and Graeme Mason talks to creator Jon Ritman to get the whole 90 minutes

When discussing retro games, perspective is a key element, and not just in regards to the graphical elements on the screen. The late Seventies saw a glut of *Pong* clones dressed up as the beautiful game; the early Eighties didn't improve matters much, until Andrew Spencer created *International Soccer* on the Commodore 64. Over on the ZX Spectrum, footie, like Eighties hooliganism, was grim: it was either the admirable, if action-lite *Football Manager* or Artic's *World Cup Football*. "Everyone knew about *International Soccer*," says Jon Ritman, creator of the famous *Match Day* series, "but as I wasn't really into the game, I'd never bothered studying it that much."



» [ZX Spectrum] He shoots, he scores! Yay! The crowd goes wild – well, as wild as a static crowd can on the Speccy.

While working on cute platformer *Bear Bovver* for Artic, Jon visited a computer trade show as a programmer-for-hire. "As a freelancer, I had the luxury of being able to choose my own projects," he explains. "There were lots of companies there, and I asked each of them what they were looking for. They all wanted one thing: *International Soccer*, on the Speccy."

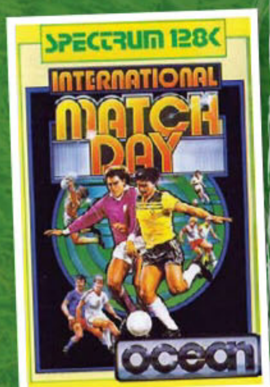
Suitably inspired, Jon returned home and began creating his idea of an action soccer simulation on the Sinclair machine, aided by Chris Clarke. Despite his relationship with Artic, the programmer was unfamiliar with its *World Cup* game before a well-timed visit to another expo. "I was at the computer show at the Alexandra Palace and saw *World Cup Soccer* two weeks after I'd started work on *Match Day*," reveals Jon. "David Ward [Ocean Software boss] approached me and we started talking about what I was working on next. We were right next to the Artic stand; I pointed at a screen *with World Cup Soccer* playing and said, 'A football game, and it's going to be loads better than that!'" Jon's bravado and bluff (he hadn't even developed a scrolling routine for *Match Day* at this stage) paid off. "I'd decided to leave Artic and was talking to other people when David Ward phoned me up just before Christmas. I didn't remember giving him my number! He said he'd give me £20,000 for the game up front. It was more money than I'd ever dreamed of."

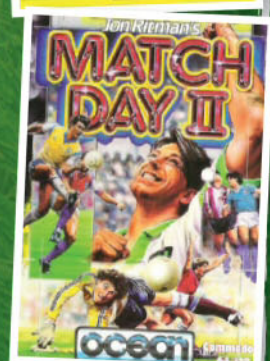
And so the man with no interest in football ("I stopped playing it in my early twenties") combined the



» [ZX Spectrum] The goalkeepers in *Match Day* left much to be desired.

look and gameplay of *International Soccer* and *World Cup Football*, added his ideas on how to improve upon those releases, and developed his own football arcade game. "The first thing I noticed after playing the Artic game was the lack of the solidity of the people – you could run through them and take the ball off them. That struck me as really dumb, so I wanted to have solid players. I also wanted larger players so you not only see more of them, but could also use their head and body." *Match Day*'s perspective remained similar to the earlier games, a pseudo-3D viewpoint that allowed for a flexibility of movement that was lacking from top-down efforts. The game looked and played superbly, the players controlling the ball perfectly, but needing directional guidance to punt the ball to a fellow player, either on the ground or in the air. "That view allowed you to work in three dimensions," adds Jon, "and you can see more of the pitch. The game was about choosing where you wanted to put the ball and on that basis you needed to be able to see the other players. There was just one thing missing, something Jon had been avoiding… "I didn't know how I was going to do the AI," he mutters, "Eventually I reached the point where I had to do it, so I created a number of







» [ZX Spectrum] Jon Ritman himself designed *Match Day*'s loading screen.

CONVERSION CAPERS

AMSTRAD CPC

■ While the graphics were notably improved, the Amstrad version chugged at a similar pace to the Spectrum original – maybe even slower. Smaller players gave a more authentic feel to the game, but the interminable crowd noise was an assault on the ears that unfortunately ruined the experience somewhat.





COMMODORE 64

■ *Match Day 2* on the Commodore 64 was coded by John Darnell and retains the slow pace of the other 8-bit versions, albeit with improved graphics. While a decent game, the lack of any significant successor to Andrew Spencer's *International Soccer* may have caused it to be a tad overrated back in the day.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Jon Ritman's original, and a masterpiece of footballing design thanks to the 'diamond deflection' technique and alternate strength kicks. Unlike the original, it was possible to score lots of different types of goals – a key variation that improved *MD2*'s long term appeal, along with league and cup options.





AMSTRAD PCW

■ It was a bizarre machine to convert the game to, but admittedly the green screen suited *Match Day 2* very well. The graphics themselves were reasonably well defined and it played as well as the other versions, bar some slightly irritatingly shrill ball sound effects. A respectable effort that probably didn't sell many copies.

MSX

■ Whisper it quietly, but we think this is just about the best version of *Match Day 2*. Its graphics are similar to the Spectrum version, but the speed is improved, as is the sound. The only downfall is some slightly flickery sprites, but this doesn't detract from the game overall. Another triumph from the Ritman-Drummond team.







» [C64] *Match Day II*'s loading screen still looks pretty cool.

routines in the game to get it going. My first bit of code was ten lines and said 'if you haven't got the ball run a bit, if you have got the ball, kick it up field.'" After 30 seconds of playing against his AI opponent, Jon realised he'd cracked it. "The computer scored against me in less than a minute! I was crying with relief!"

Jon continued to refine *Match Day*'s AI, including a system that helped the computer decide for the player which footballer would be placed under its control next. Yet the gameplay itself was simple – a key tenet of Jon's, as he explained in an interview in issue 33 of *Crash*. "I don't like games with difficult controls – it's like having an adventure that doesn't understand words." The result was a smooth football game that narrowly avoided a smash score in the aforementioned Spectrum magazine. It didn't matter, despite a licensing faux pas in which Ocean obtained use of the theme tune to *Match Of The Day*, and nothing else, *Match Day* was a huge success and stalwart in the computer game charts for many years to come. Then, 18 months after the successful Christmas launch of *Match Day*, Sinclair finally unveiled its 128k ZX Spectrum. Keen to offer a range of software to go with the machine, Ocean asked Jon Ritman to come up



» [ZX Spectrum] Here's the trick in *Match Day 2* – stand at this point and aim the strongest kick goalward. A guaranteed goal every time.

> **"I don't like games with difficult controls – it's like having an adventure that doesn't understand words"**
> Jon Ritman

with an improved version of the game. "There was very little added," he admits, "The Spectrum 128k was being launched in Spain, and Ocean had a deal with Sinclair to package *International Match Day*. We flashed up the sound and added a few drawn screens, but other than the obvious change to teams, gameplay was identical."

At this point the story of *Match Day* takes a brief pause as its creator, beguiled by the remarkable graphics of Ultimate's *Knight Lore*, began to experiment with isometric games. First came *Batman*, then *Head Over Heels*, games that saw Jon's stock rise immeasurably as a programmer of some distinction. Other software houses had begun to take note. Before he began *Match Day 2*, Jon was invited to go and see Mirrorsoft, the rival company ready to make the coder a sizeable increase in advance. "So I went back to Ocean, who I wanted to stay with really as they were tried and tested," says Jon. Unwilling to get dragged into a bidding war, David Ward matched the Mirrorsoft offer, which was readily accepted. *Match Day 2* was back on and under the familiar Ocean banner.

After completing the original *Match Day*, Jon reveals that he had plenty of ideas how to improve the game straight away, before becoming distracted by isometric games. Once clear of his work on *Head Over Heels*, he began working on the sequel that would incorporate many of these ideas, and more.

EVOLVING THE BEAUTIFUL GAME



FAST ACTION GRAPHICS

INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
COMMODORE 64, 1983

■ Until Andrew Spencer's *International Soccer* burst onto the scene, football games had been either laughably poor or managerial in scope. Fast-paced action, excellent graphics and sheer playability ensured it was a hit, and the benchmark for Commodore 64 footie games for many years to come.



PRECISE PASSING, SOLID PLAYERS

MATCH DAY
ZX SPECTRUM, 1984

■ Jon Ritman's original classic may have borrowed graphics from his previous game, *Bear Bovver*, yet its precise control method and ability to finally be able to string together a decent set of passes made it a massive hit, especially on the ZX Spectrum. Just don't mention the Amstrad or Commodore 64 conversions.



CLOSE UPS, GOALMOUTH ACTION

SUPER ACTION FOOTBALL
COLECOVISION, 1984

■ This ColecoVision game, which kicked off in 1984, introduced 'close-ups' when the action heated up and a change of view from side-on to goalmouth only when the play approached either end of the pitch. It's not the greatest game based on football, but it's a good attempt at a tactical and varied approach.



PLAY AS ONE PLAYER, CAREER MODE

FOOTBALLER OF THE YEAR
ZX SPECTRUM, 1986

■ The majority of football games involved the player taking control of multiple players with no discernible individual identity. *Footballer Of The Year* changed that, putting you in charge of a young striker, struggling to make his way up through the leagues. A clear influence on the mobile phone hit *New Star Soccer*.



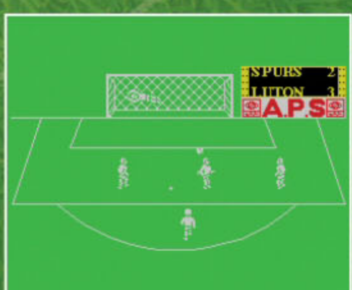
» Chris Clarke and Jon Ritman, circa 1985.



» [ZX Spectrum] God bless the Spectrum colour palette.

First up was the graphics – Jon never claimed to be much of an artist, hence the borrowed sprites from *Bear Bovver* in *Match Day*. Fortunately, he had already formed a partnership with Bernie Drummond, who would create all the graphics for its sequel. "The graphics needed improving," says Jon, "although the men ended up being a bit tubby. Bernie would spend a lot of time moving one pixel to another." However, where *Match Day 2* shone was its gameplay. "The deflection system off the body was a lot more advanced – I called it 'diamond deflection' and it was one of the fundamentals of the game." The sequel took the method of deflection from the original and expanded on it hugely. Now, the angle and speed of the ball was influenced by which direction the player was facing, and which body part the ball struck. "That created a skill," says Jon, "a skill of manipulating the ball, essentially another way of passing the ball. If you put the ball under control, you might not get past an opposition player. But if you pulled back a little and waited for the ball to bounce and let it skid off you, the next guy could get it." *Match Day 2* also incorporated a new range of options including a league and tactics. And while retaining the original's basic passing method, *Match Day 2* added different strengths of kick, including back heel, and a neat volley that could be devastating at close range. The only aspects Jon failed to address were the goalkeepers ("Still shit," he mumbles) and the speed of the game. "There was so much going on the screen," he admits, "and it's a crappy little processor on the Spectrum. If you look at it now it's slow, but back then it was what you were used to." And after having been disappointed with Ocean's effort at converting the first game to the C64, Jon became more involved this time around. "John Darnell did the 6502 conversion and I'd debug over the phone with them. I'd be single-stepping my Z80 and he's be doing the same with his. The final day of deadline we had a 26-hour phone call to debug, and every time we found one he'd say, 'Thank God,' and he meant it. But it wasn't God, it was Jon Ritman!"

With *Crash* correcting its error three years earlier and bestowing the Spectrum version of *Match Day 2* with a coveted Crash Smash, the game became another best seller and another feather in the cap of the Ritman-Drummond team. "Ocean never pushed us for anything," reveals Jon. "They just let us do whatever we felt like doing." Anticipating the end of the 8-bit market, Jon was soon looking ahead, and began working freelance for the very people that had inspired ▶



PLAY AS GOALKEEPER

PETER SHILTON'S HANDBALL MARADONA

ZX SPECTRUM, 1986

■ This idiosyncratic effort from Grandslam Entertainment introduced a novel approach, that, to the best of our knowledge, hasn't been repeated since. The player could only take control of the team's custodian as shots rained in constantly from the opposition strike force.



MULTI-STRENGTH KICKS, HEADERS, JUMPING

MATCH DAY 2

ZX SPECTRUM, 1987

■ A huge leap up in terms of gameplay from *Match Day*. Multi-strength kicks, volleys, diamond deflection, headers, jumping, league and cup options and a cute back-heel. Crucially, the game gave the player the variety to create different goals-scoring options, with the only negative point its slow pace and rubbish goalkeepers.



MULTI DIRECTIONAL PLAY, FOULS, PENALTIES

EMLYN HUGHES INTERNATIONAL SOCCER

AMSTRAD, 1988

■ Published by Audiogenic, *Emlyn Hughes International Soccer* revolutionised 8-bit soccer. While similar graphically to its forebears, the game's multidirectional control, implementation of fouls and penalties and fast gameplay was a huge progression for 1988.



WEATHER, REPLAYS, TACKLES, OVERHEAD VIEW

MICROPROSE SOCCER

COMMODORE 64, 1988

■ Developed by the talented team that would go on to devise the famous *Sensible Soccer* series, *Microprose Soccer* introduced an overhead viewpoint and a host of other fun footie features, such as the impressive banana kick and action replays. To distil *Microprose Soccer* down to one word is easy: fun.

MATCH DAY

SOCCER LEAGUES

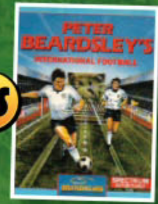
Let the battle of the player-endorsed games commence!


VS



VS




VS



VS


GLEN HODDLE SOCCER
MOST LIKELY TO: Pitch an inch-perfect pass to an attacking player's feet.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Get muddy and tick off their dry cleaner.

GRAEME SOUNESS INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
MOST LIKELY TO: Get muddy.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Let fancy-dan ball players get the better of them.

EMLYN HUGHES INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
MOST LIKELY TO: Have a particularly annoying voice.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Pay attention and be nice to the referee.

GAZZA'S SUPER SOCCER
MOST LIKELY TO: Play a ridiculously impudent pass, bisecting four players.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Go 90 minutes without getting a yellow card…

KENNY DALGLISH SOCCER MATCH
MOST LIKELY TO: Score a lot of goals.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Be easy to understand to any non-Scottish person.

PETER BEARDSLEY'S INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL
MOST LIKELY TO: Play a neat reverse pass to release a fellow attacker.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Win a beauty contest.

PETER SHILTON'S HANDBALL MARADONA!
MOST LIKELY TO: Have their career defined by a moment.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Win any dancing competitions.

GARY LINEKER'S SUPERSTAR SOCCER
MOST LIKELY TO: Score calmly from the penalty box.
LEAST LIKELY TO: Score from outside the penalty box.

QUARTER FINALS

GLEN HODDLE VS GRAEME SOUNESS
■ Undeterred by Hoddle's delicate chips and deft touches, Souness subtly hacks down the midfielder in the 20th minute, thus ensuring a quiet afternoon. With his own footballing skills typically underestimated, Souness scores from just inside the area to seal the win.

WINNER
GRAEME SOUNESS

EMLYN HUGHES VS GAZZA
■ No contest. Adept at both defending and making marauding runs up field, Hughes has the better of Gazza from the start. His constant verbals in the ear of the ref get the midfielder in trouble for his raised elbows, and Hughes takes advantage to secure victory.

WINNER
EMLYN HUGHES

KENNY DALGLISH VS PETER BEARDSLEY
■ Two Liverpool legends face off in this match, and it's Dalglish's experience that pays dividends, as he nutmegs a hapless Beardsley, before nudging him off the ball for his second, and ultimately decisive, goal. Scotland, for once, prevails.

WINNER
KENNY DALGLISH

PETER SHILTON VS GARY LINEKER
■ Top striker versus top goalkeeper! Lineker pauses on the edge of the area and, despite being temporarily fazed by Shilton's frighteningly Seventies barnet, closes in and places the ball neatly into the back of the net. Fingertips, but a goal. Ready salted!

WINNER
GARY LINEKAR

SEMI FINALS

GRAEME SOUNESS VS EMLYN HUGHES
■ It's the first of two semi-finals that pitch Scotland vs England, and Emlyn Hughes strides out purposefully, dodging Souness' crude lunges with ease. He easily nets a brace and it's into the final for the man with the high-pitched voice!

WINNER
EMLYN HUGHES

KENNY DALGLISH VS GARY LINEKAR
■ The battle of the strikers, with Dalglish's raw strength and talent taking on Lineker's predatory instincts within the six-yard box. Both consistent scorers, it's Dalglish who triumphs, taking advantage of Lineker's brief pause to post a tweet.

WINNER
KENNY DALGLISH

FINAL



EMLYN HUGHES VS KENNY DALGLISH
■ The battle of the behemoths in the final, and Dalglish sets the pace early with a remarkable shot from the edge of the area. He doubles his lead in the second half, but Hughes stages an astonishing comeback to equalize in the last minute of added time. Hughes' experience at penalty shoot outs prevails, and the England man is crowned champion. Hooray!

WINNER
EMLYN HUGHES





» The Crash Match Day Challenge invited readers to take on the game's creators. Predictably, Jon Ritman won.



» [ZX Spectrum] Scoring with a header from a corner was tricky, but possible in *Match Day 2*.

him to create his isometric adventures, Ultimate, now morphed into Rare. The Stamper brothers had begun development of an arcade board called Razz. Based around a Z80 processor with additional sound and hardware assistance, the intention was to create a cadre of freelancers to devise games for the new system. One freelancer was Jon Ritman, answering a plea for coders in an article in *Crash*. "They'd always been mysterious, the Stampers, and it was a weird thing, suddenly they were in this magazine and asking people to work with them," he says. Jon called up *Crash* and got Rare's number. "Turned out they'd played my games and I was arrogant enough to assume I would be offered work." Jon suggested a football game for the board and began work on *Final Whistle*. "It was like *Match Day 2* jazzed up," he recalls. The advantage of the new technology was speed, as Jon explains. "It had a unique way of doing graphics. It chucked eight bits per pixel at the screen device and it took six bits for the colour and two bits to go to a palette. Then it took two bits for the direction of the next pixel, so up, down, left or right. If you wanted to draw a circle on the Spectrum, you drew a whole square with only the circle defined in it. On a Razz board, you literally drew the circle." Ultimately, *Final Whistle* was abandoned as Rare and Jon himself saw that his style of football videogame was not quite suitable for arcades.

For a while it seemed like the *Match Day* series was destined never to surface again. After Rare, Jon began work full time for Domark and on another football game, based on *Final Whistle*'s working title of *Soccerama*, and to be released on the SNES. "It looked good and was similar to the other *Match Day* traditions," says Jon. "It had Mode 7 which meant you could do a rotating pitch, which was reasonably smooth." However, despite his own rigorous testing methods, a bug appeared in *Soccerama* which meant there was no way the game was going to pass Nintendo's quality control. "You could play it for three days solid and nothing would happen," grimaces Jon. "Then it would just freeze and lock up. I was using my own dev system and debugger, and I just couldn't find it. In the end I told Domark I needed an ICE." An ICE, or internal circuit emulator, copied a game down to machine code level and enabled the programmer to see what happened after every single cycle of code. "So after the bug happened, you would have been able to go back and see how it reached that point." The system was very expensive and unfortunately, according to Jon, Domark obtained the NTSC version instead of his native PAL. "So it was a complete waste of time, and they never got another." SNES *Soccerama* was canned.



» [ZX Spectrum] A quick volley homes in on the keeper, but he looks to have it covered.

"It would just freeze and lock up. I was using my own dev system and debugger, and I just couldn't find [the bug]"
Jon Ritman

Finally, in 1998, the *Match Day* series got its next, final, game. Developed by Jon's company, Cranberry Source, the game was to be released as *Match Day 3* by Ocean Software, before the publisher entered a phase where it was taken over by Infogrames. The game even received a mixed review in *PC Gamer* which praised its control system, but criticised the lack of modern football simulation tropes such as commentary and realistic graphics. Cranberry Source sold the game to Acclaim which rebranded it as *Super Match Soccer* and released it on PC and PlayStation. "Aspects turned out to be a disaster. We did motion capture, but the company we chose were rubbish, so we had to abandon that and make it up from scratch, making it as realistic as we could." Rubbing shoulders with the likes of the *Actua Soccer* and the *FIFA* series did the game no favours, regardless of gameplay. "I liked to be able to pass into space and develop the play – the journalists couldn't handle it, and in the end it wasn't successful."



» [PC] Nervous about continuing the famous name, Acclaim changed the third game's name to *Super Match Soccer*.

Despite its tame ending, the *Match Day* series is one that has enthralled gamers and football fans over the years, and Jon finishes by revealing how he always thought the interpretation of the beautiful game should be. "For me, a football game should be about passing into space. If you watch a football match, you see the ball played behind the defence and the attackers running onto it. That's where the big plays are made, and you need different buttons and options to do that. My games were always about learning, and the joy came from the mastery of the game. It was all about the playability and the player's ability." ✱





Elf needs food badly, again. Warrior is about to die, once more. But was Gauntlet II really just a lazy rerun of the original game? Martyn Carroll sets off to explore the sequel's hidden depths

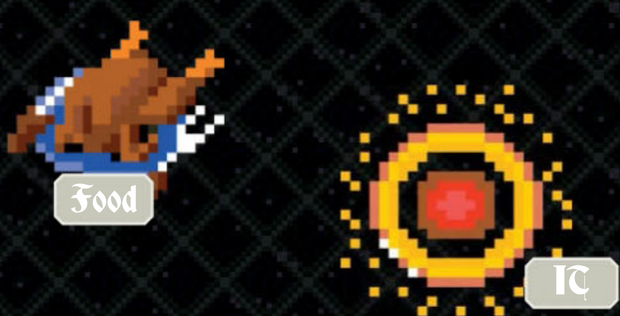
Precisely zero people were surprised when Atari Games released *Gauntlet II* in August 1986, less than a year after the first game debuted. The original *Gauntlet* was, after all, a smash-hit success that out-earned every other coin-op in the arcade. This was not mere happenstance – *Gauntlet* was specifically engineered to make as much money as possible.

The game's project leader, Ed Logg, was trying to work out a way of increasing earnings at a time when players in the US were not prepared to spend more than a quarter on a single credit. And when they deposited that quarter, the game was engaged for two minutes or however long,





» [Arcade] Bringing new meaning to the term 'haunted house'.













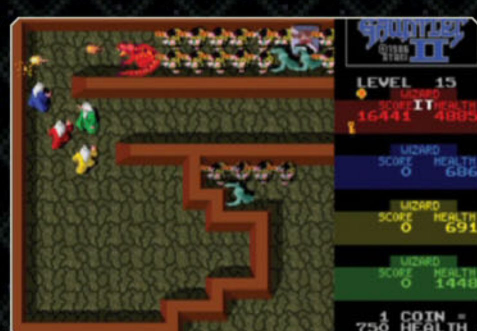
during which time a crowd might gather but they would have to wait to play. Ed's eureka moment was creating a game where four players could play simultaneously. They could join in or drop out at will, and by inserting extra coins they could prolong their playing time. Four players effectively meant four times the earning potential of each machine. Of course, this gambit would have backfired hilariously had *Gauntlet* been a terrible game that no-one wanted to play. But thanks to a dollop of Dandy, a sprinkle of *D&D* and a good amount of Atari arcade expertise, the game was a genuinely fantastic, action-packed, four-player dungeon-crawler. *Gauntlet* was *the* hot coin-op of 1985.

The game remained an important property for Atari throughout the following year. Numerous revisions were issued in the form of EPROM updates that fixed bugs and tweaked gameplay. A later revision also addressed the issue where a skilled player could survive almost indefinitely on a single credit (which was not good for profits). A 'proper' version 2.0 was always in the works, however, and according to Bob Flanagan, who designed and programmed the *Gauntlet* games alongside Ed Logg, it certainly wasn't a rush job despite it arriving so soon after the original. "We spent about ten months coding



» [Arcade] Force fields and stun tiles were two new elements, and they were introduced early on in the game.





» [Arcade] All geek dreams are realised as four wizards team up to slay a dragon.









DEVELOPER Q&A

Richard Costello was responsible for the ST and Amiga versions

How did the *Gauntlet II* conversion come about?

I was working as an in-house programmer at Gremlin Birmingham, which was part owned by Geoff Brown of US Gold. For Gremlin I was working on research and development for the Atari ST. The ST version of *Gauntlet* had been outsourced because at the time Geoff didn't have any in-house 16-bit resource, so I volunteered to code *Gauntlet II* in my spare time for US Gold whilst I worked for Gremlin during office hours.

The ST version of *Gauntlet* looked good but suffered from choppy character movement and scrolling. Was this something you specifically tried to resolve with *Gauntlet II*?

There were two problems with the Atari ST *Gauntlet*. Firstly, the programmer tried to replicate the arcade machine graphically by using 24x24 pixel sprites and 24x24 pixel background tiles, and secondly, he was a PC programmer, used to x86 and primarily writing in C rather than pure assembler. The above worked on the PC because it had a byte-per-pixel screen mode, but with the ST each set of 16 pixels on the screen were represented by eight interleaved bytes, which meant accessing the screen was more complex and time consuming. To get the frame-rate and playability the graphics needed to be adjusted to a more optimum size for the ST's hardware, namely 16x16 pixel sprites on a 16x16 pixel tile background. Plus I coded *everything* in 68000. The smaller graphics and optimised format meant I could draw the scrolling, tiled background with up to 128 foreground sprites at 25Hz.

Did you have the coin-op?

We did have the machine in the office, and we could enter a 'system check' mode which would display the contents of memory on the screen so Kev Bulmer, the artist, could review the frames of the characters – however, he still had to redraw all of them. Tony Porter's editor on the Spectrum was used to generate the level data – I just wrote the 68K interpreter to take this data and present the right stuff on the ST's screen.



» [Atari ST] The 16-bit versions opened with a sequence featuring an animated coin-op cab.

Did including support for four-players, via the printer port, cause any development headaches?

I actually invented the theory and the wiring for the connector. It was a simple idea because back then the printer port was just a parallel interface (8-bit port with a couple of bits for handshaking) so with five switches per controller (up, down, left, right, fire) you just needed ten bits for another two users. I was amazed at how quickly my suggestion turned into a few thousand connectors appearing in the CentreSoft warehouse.

Overall, how pleased were you with your finished versions?

I was more than happy with them. I used to enjoy doing coin-op conversions because the specification was set in concrete before a line of code was written, so no moving goal posts. From a coding standpoint it was my second favourite project behind *Mortal Kombat II* for the Amiga.

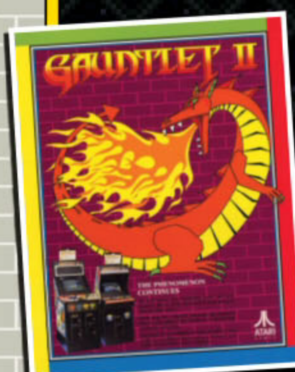




» [Arcade] Getting too close to a dragon was not overly recommended.

▶ *Gauntlet II*," he says, "which was less than the 12-16 months for *Gauntlet*, although a lot of that was hardware, the maze editor and support."

As you'd imagine, the sequel was produced purely to capitalise on the continued popularity of the original. "Earnings were strong and there was determined to be a market for a new version. *Gauntlet II* was simply the next product, intended to have new levels, new gameplay, and most importantly the ability to have any character at any position." As Bob states, a key feature was that players could now select any character they wanted, whereas in the original if a character was already in play they could not be chosen. It was observed that some players would not join in if Warrior was already taken, for example, or if the Valkyrie was the only available character, so this was mainly done to remove another 'block' to playing the game. But Bob is adamant on the







» [Arcade] Level 6 introduced one of the more perplexing features – invisible walls!



"I volunteered to code Gauntlet II in my spare time for US Gold whilst I worked for Gremlin"
Richard Costello

position that the sequel wasn't solely about boosting takings. "There was a definite desire to evolve the gameplay experience," he reveals, "with the ability to have four wizards instead of one, for instance, and the dragon, the secret rooms, rotated and flipped mazes, 'IT' gameplay, power-ups, and many other game extensions."

The sequel did introduce a lot of elements. There were new amulets that bestowed the player with temporary abilities, including reflecting shots (you could bounce shots off walls), transportability (you were able to move through walls and other objects) and repulsiveness (enemies would be repelled away from you). New maze features were also introduced, including intermittent force fields that you had to dash past, stun tiles that briefly incapacitated players, and trap tiles that would remove walls that were often holding Death and other nasties at bay. Some walls could be shot or shoved, others were invisible or would move on their own. Sometimes exits would move, sometimes exits were fake. All this resulted in levels feeling more interactive and 'alive'.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Just how faithful were the home versions to the Atari coin-op?



ZX SPECTRUM

■ The same team responsible for the Z80 *Gauntlet* returned for the sequel. Most of the arcade features were included and the game played perfectly well, despite the lack of smoothness due to character scrolling.



COMMODORE 64

■ The original C64 version of *Gauntlet* was solid, yet it suffered from some bugs. The sequel was more polished but ran at a slower pace than the original. The result was a dungeon crawl in the most literal sense.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ This was the pick of the 8-bit home computer versions, as it featured the detail of the C64 release while maintaining the speed of the Spectrum game. Some decent music and audio effects rounded off a great conversion.



ATARI ST

■ Self-billed as, "The most authentic simulation yet from an arcade machine," and for once that was pretty accurate. It featured all of the coin-op's gameplay elements along with the digitised speech and support for four-player co-op.



AMIGA

■ The original *Gauntlet* never made it to the Amiga, so expectations were high for the sequel and it didn't disappoint. It was based on the ST version but in this was no bad thing. The four-player option was carried over, too.



PC/DOS

■ The PC release was based on the ST and Amiga versions and the result was similar in terms of look and feel. It also included an alternative version with a smaller game screen for PC owners with slower processors.



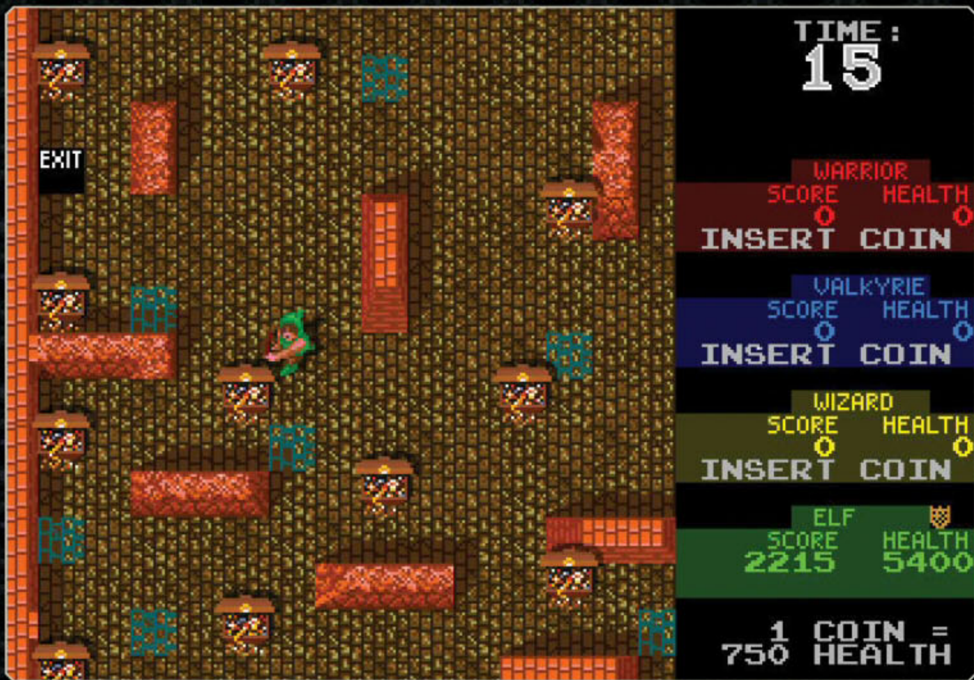
NES

■ Arriving late (in 1990) but worth the wait, the NES version squeezed the arcade game onto a cartridge. It featured all of the enemies, collectables and secrets, plus lots of digitised speech and even four-player support.



GAME BOY

■ Trying to replicate sprawling, enemy-filled dungeons on the Game Boy's tiny screen was a tough ask, but the end result actually worked rather well – particularly in two-player mode using the Game Link feature.



» [Arcade] Treasure rooms returned, and, once again, you had to grab as much loot as you could before the timer ran out.



» [Arcade] Reflecting shots were very useful, enabling you to bounce projectiles off walls.

The original dungeon dwellers returned along with some new monsters. The most inventive was 'IT', a swirling apparition that would curse players on contact. Once cursed, enemies would swarm towards you, and the only way to remove the curse was to pass it onto another player, resulting in madcap bouts of dungeon tag. Finally there was the dragon, which was the largest enemy and, in some ways, also the biggest disappointment. Dragons would lurk in various levels and often guard the exit, but anyone hoping to encounter a massive, fire-breathing beast on, say, level 100 would be disappointed. The sequel followed the design of the original where the game continued ad infinitum and there was no final dungeon (unlike the NES version of the original *Gauntlet* which *did* end at level 100 with a boss battle against a three-headed dragon, no less).

"I did not use any of the original C64 code even though I had access to it all"
Stuart Gregg



» [Arcade] In North America accessing and raiding a secret room gave players a code which they could use to win prizes from Atari.

"There was no end game," confirms Bob. "The idea for the *Gauntlet* series was infinite play. The dragon and the treasure rooms were meant to help with shorter-term goals and completion feelings for the player. Many players felt that there were an infinite number of mazes and possibly that they were generated – that was an authoring cheat from us." For the record, there were actually 105 standard levels, plus 11 treasure rooms and a couple of secret rooms, making 118 unique levels in total. Each level could be flipped horizontally, flopped vertically, and also flip-flopped, so there were 472 variations overall, which would repeat forever, in theory.

Running The Gauntlet

Some tips and tricks to help improve your subterranean life expectancy



Good Elf

■ If you're playing solo, choose Elf. He's quick, has good shot speed, receives lots of food, and if you build up his magic he's as powerful as Wizard when casting spells. Valkyrie is also recommended.



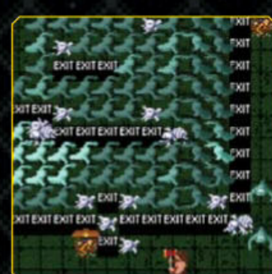
Ghost Hassle

■ Of all the regular enemies ghosts are the most dangerous as they can't be defeated hand-to-hand, and will sap strength on contact. Take them out (and their generators) with shots at the earliest chance.



Blobs Begone

■ Those annoying acid blobs are not as invincible as the game suggests. You can destroy them by using a magic potion to stun them, then quickly using another potion to remove them completely.



Exit Strategy

■ As in the original *Gauntlet*, if you stall for a while all of the doors will open, and then eventually all of the walls will turn to exits. It just takes a lot longer for this to trigger in the sequel.



Losing It

■ The only way to get rid of the 'IT' curse, besides passing it to others, is to exit the current level. Let the affected player rush towards the exit while you protect them from the pursuing hoard.

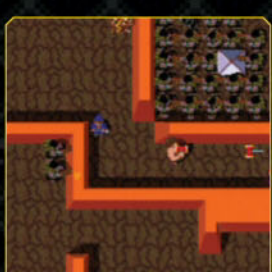




» [Arcade] The mugger was a new, thief-like enemy who would dash in and steal your health.

On first impressions *Gauntlet II* may have looked (and sounded) like a quick cash grab, yet it introduced a number of new game features that, while mostly minor, made the game more attractive and challenging – particularly for those that had exhausted the original. It didn't become so repetitive so quickly, that's for sure. Dedicated *Gauntlet II* cabs were manufactured but the game was mainly sold in the form of conversions kits for *Gauntlet*, and while it's always a shame to lose an original cab to a kit, in this case it was more acceptable as the sequel really did supersede the original.

To prove the point try going back to the original after playing the sequel for any length of time. That's almost certainly the reason why Sony opted to release the sequel on the PS3 in 2007, as a digital release complete with online co-op support. Sadly that release is no longer available, but both titles have been included on the various *Midway Arcade* compilations released over the years, and in 2016 the games popped up in *Lego Dimensions* as part of the *Midway Arcade* level pack. There are plenty of opportunities to revisit *Gauntlet II* – and these days you don't need a sack full of silver coins to play.



STOP THIEF!

■ The thief in the sequel is more tricksy and will try and dodge your shots. Remember that the thief will follow your path, so it's possible to stop him by pushing a movable wall to block him off.



DRAGONS DEN

■ Dragons take multiple shots to kill. The best method is to hold the reflective shots potion and bounce your shots off a wall. Alternatively, get another player to divert the dragon's attention.

DEVELOPER Q&A

Stuart Gregg unveils the details of the Commodore 64 version



How did you land the job of converting *Gauntlet II* to the C64?
I was hired at Gremlin Birmingham as a junior programmer, about halfway through the original *Gauntlet* development. I was the general dogsbody. I did some testing, wrote some of the intros and so on. After that, I spent a lot of time under programmer Tony Porter's wing and worked on a couple of Z80 projects with him. I also made a start on a Thompson port of *Gauntlet* based on the Z80 code. When it was time to do *Gauntlet II*, US Gold didn't want Bob Armour to work on it as he'd been late with the C64 version of *Gauntlet* and didn't iron out all of the 'features' until he had finished the Atari 8-bit version.

So Bob was off the job and you were brought on?
Yes. I had a lot of respect for Bob. He came from Atari development and was trying to push the envelope with the original C64 version. He got a lot of pressure and flack for not getting it done on time, especially as it was US Gold's big title for Christmas and I didn't want that to happen to me.

How did you approach *Gauntlet II* then? Were you able to update Bob's code?
I didn't use any of the original C64 code even though I had access to it all. After the issues with the original *Gauntlet*, and the experience I had working with Tony, we decided to basically port the Z80 version to the C64, mainly to make sure it was ready in time for Christmas. So we decided to get rid of smooth scrolling and run at 25fps. It basically plays like the Amstrad CPC version.

That explains why the sequel runs more slowly than the original! Were you pleased with how it turned out?
Overall I was pleased with it. I was 20 at the time, it was my first big title, and I got it done on time. Given my experience, or lack of, at that time as a developer, it would have been silly to try and do more.





CLASSIC MOMENTS

Panzer Dragoon

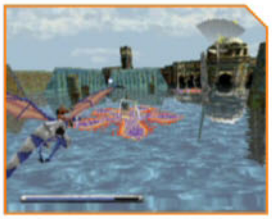
» **PLATFORM:** SATURN » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM ANDROMEDA » **RELEASED:** 1995

It's the Sega Saturn's launch day, and you're one of the lucky people who have managed to scrape together the enormous £400 asking price, while still having enough left over for a couple of games. *Virtua Fighter* was a no-brainer, but the other one was a tricky choice. Having heard less than stellar things about *Daytona*, you plumped for *Panzer Dragoon* instead – a decision quickly vindicated by some dazzling 3D and amazing sound. But as the second level loads, you begin to worry about how Sega could possibly top the majestic flooded ruins you just saw.

Those worries are instantly wiped from your mind by a powerful mixture of fear and awe once you've dispatched the initial cannon fodder of the second stage. Rising from the desert in a majestic arc, an enormous sand worm lunges towards you in pursuit, displaying a quartet of menacing red spots that immediately mark it as hostile. But there's no time to catch your breath, as another one emerges immediately afterwards – good luck player one! ✱

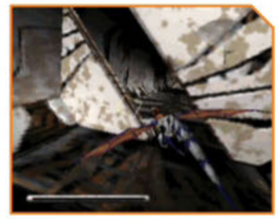
MORE CLASSIC PANZER DRAGOON MOMENTS

Behold, The Beauty



It's likely that *Panzer Dragoon* was your first experience of 32-bit gaming on the Saturn, and that first level was a breathtaking introduction. As you flew over the ocean, the pillars of a ruined city crashed into the water all around you – all to the sound of one of gaming's greatest musical compositions.

A Tight Squeeze



The fourth stage of *Panzer Dragoon* is a hectic pursuit through a twisting tunnel as your enemies try to take advantage of the confined space to gun you down. However, the real danger is at the end of the level, as you have to pilot your dragon through openings in the tunnel's barrier door system at a high speed.

Bomb The Base



You've had experiences with the Empire in the first couple of stages, but the third is when you're stepping into enemy territory as you stage a raid on a heavily fortified base. You'll have to use your agility and firepower to survive the bombardment from a large number of emplacements that were constructed to repel your assault.

Shots Fired!



Panzer Dragoon's unique art style means that you might not recognise the fifth boss as a battleship straight away – especially as your first job is to deal with the wingmen. But you'll recognise it as such as soon as the artillery begins its cannonade, and its barrage of projectiles presents a challenge like none you'll have faced before.

BIO

As a novice designer in his early twenties, Yukio Futatsugi wasn't an obvious choice to head up a major new title for Sega's next-generation Saturn console – and not just any major title, but Sega's most expensive home console game to date. Thankfully, the director and Team Andromeda delivered a great shooter which offered players astonishing visuals, an incomparable CD soundtrack and full-360 degree control. Sales weren't quite as high as Sega had expected, but the game was successful enough to launch a series, and the first sequel, *Panzer Dragoon II Zwei,* arrived in 1996.



Top Ten Hits

The budget market for 8-bit computers became big business in the Eighties. One of many to join the battle for your buck, Top Ten Hits had lofty ambitions, if the name alone is anything to go by. Kieren Hawken discovers if it managed to live up to its own hype

Readers with a good memory may remember our Audiogenic article in issue 146 and how the company started in the quiet village of Theale, with Martin Maynard and his music studio. Martin had been running his studio since 1975 and had since also ventured into the world of recording and publishing music himself. His tape reproduction plant was manufacturing thousands of cassettes a year for Commodore, as well as several other prominent companies, so moving into the software industry seemed like a natural step. His ventures with Audiogenic didn't quite go as planned, though, and he was forced to close that branch of his business down in 1985 after it failed to crack the cutthroat hardware market with a series of failed peripherals. This part of the business was sold to Peter Calver and his company Supersoft, which would quickly rebrand to use the Audiogenic name, but this wouldn't be the end of Maynard's venture into the world of videogames…

Step forward Darryl Still, who had already been working for Audiogenic as a product manager but was becoming very disillusioned with the way things were going. "The company was schizophrenic at the time I joined," he laments, "with two totally different parts. The Harrow office (Supersoft), who had bought a share of the original company and was run by Peter Calver and Pearl Wellard. And then the Theale office (Audiogenic), which was where the original MD Martin Maynard was still situated along with his music business." He knew things were going to come to a head as he went on to explain, "We were pretty prominent in the BBC and C64 markets, but the joint relationship did not really sustain and [Audiogenic] moved to the Harrow offices,





» [C64] *Hyper Biker* is big colourful racing game by Tony Stoddart who would later go on to program the infamous *Rise Of The Robots*.

» [Atari ST] Published on the Go-Dax label, *Bounce Out* is a far more tactical approach on the classic arcade game *Pac-Mania*.

INSTANT EXPERT

- Top Ten MD Martin Maynard was previously the owner of Audiogenic Software.
- **The sister label of Top Ten was 16-bit-focused publisher Go-Dax.**
- Top Ten Hits did actually have several top-ten hits including *Grid Iron* and *Orc Attack*.
- **Programmer of *Dawnssley* Paul Machacek would later become a key figure at Rare.**
- Top Ten rereleased videogames by Thorn Emi, Bubble Bus and the highly-acclaimed Cosmi Corp.
- **A grand total of eight different platforms were supported by Top Ten and Go-Dax.**
- Top Ten Software boss Darryl Still would later become marketing manager of Atari UK.
- **Artist Jolyon Myers most recently worked on the *Call Of Duty* franchise.**
- Top Ten Hits had an exclusive agreement to provide compilations for Woolworths.
- **The company had its very own tape reproduction facility, which saved on costs greatly.**

with Maynard leaving to set up Maynard International Ltd.. I stayed with that operation, which had a number of parts – the music studios, a duplication plant, a business software division pushing a spreadsheet package called Swift etc.." With the expertise of Darryl on board, Martin was keen to exploit the available talent to him with a new label, which he named Top Ten Hits, presumably hoping to achieve some success and no doubt inspired by his exploits in the music industry. Darryl saw an opportunity to bring one of his own ventures into the equation. "After speaking with Martin I was able to bring my own company, Go-Dax, into the mix," he remembers. "So I was essentially employed to run two labels, Martin's new label Top Ten and my own Go-Dax label, which was a 16-bit publisher specialising in games for the Acorn Archimedes and Atari ST."

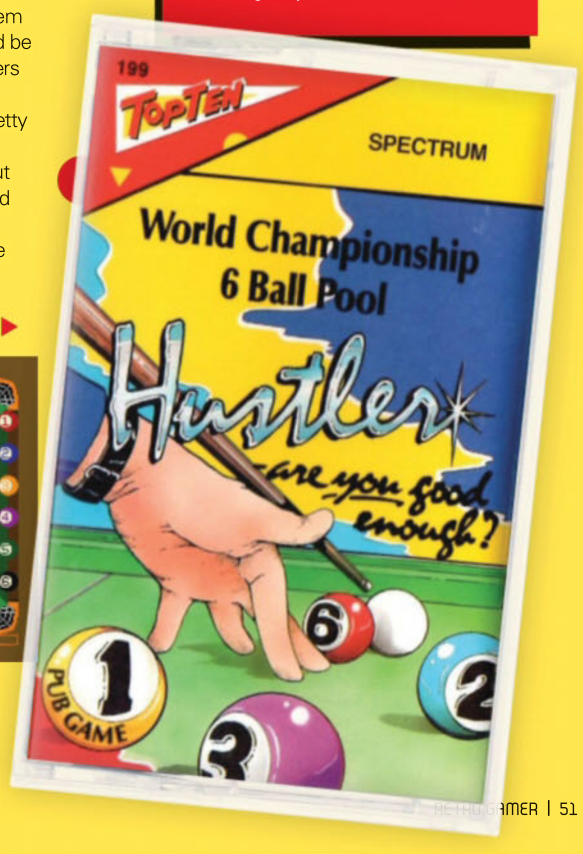
The next thing Darryl had to do was find people to make games for him, but that wouldn't be too much of a problem as he was still rich with contacts from his Audiogenic days. "Many of our games came from existing contacts, people I'd worked with at places like Icon Software, which Audiogenic had purchased while I was there, but we also ran competitions and picked up titles from trade shows etc.." Anyone who grew up through the Eighties will remember the deluge of games on the market, and also the questionable quality that came with a lot of it. So we were interested to find out what the quality of submissions was like for

> **"The licences were all territory restricted, but that was probably the only challenge we had"**
> Darryl Still

Top Ten Hits. "The standard was surprisingly pretty high!" enthused Darryl. "I don't remember many of the rejections, put it that way. But I do remember that we weren't exactly overwhelmed by numbers of them either!" Another big part of Top Ten's strategy would be licensing former full-price games from other publishers and then rereleasing them at a budget price. Again, Darryl's relationships came in handy. "They were pretty much all historical licences that Martin owned from his Audiogenic days, that he retained after the buyout by Supersoft. Audiogenic had, for example, published most of Cosmi's games in the UK. The licences were all territory restricted, but that was probably the only challenge we had." As well as US label Cosmi Corporation Top Ten Hits also rereleased titles from companies such as Thorn EMI, Bubble Bus and



» [Atari ST] Developed by Bubble Bus Software, of *Star Quake* fame, *Hustler* is an extremely comprehensive pool simulator.





PICK YOUR OWN BOGIE

Anyone who grew up in the Eighties will remember the magic of Woolworths. The shelves full of toys, the rows of records, the buckets of sweets and, of course, the stacks of great videogames. So striking a deal with the retailer seemed a natural choice for Top Ten. In co-operation with the now-defunct store, Top Ten produced a series of great compilations for the C64, Amstrad and Spectrum called *Bogie's Pick*. These exclusive offerings retailed at the bargain price of just £2.99 and each tape contained several different titles with classics such as Herbert's *Dummy Run*, *Druid's Moon* and Top Ten's very own debut game *Dawnssley* being featured. The value of the packs appealed to price-conscious parents, while the character featured on the packaging would appeal to children. Darryl Still explained how Bogie was born: "He probably came from one of our kids or our juvenile sense of humour, to be honest. The original label was just *Bogie's Pick* and the character was much more of a Humphrey Bogart figure. The 'Super' pick was when we extended the amount of games in the pack at Woolworths' request and Bogie gained his baseball cap and became more of a teenage icon."

▶ Axxent Software. Top Ten Hits and Go-Dax were able to quickly build up a portfolio of software across many formats from the Electron to the Atari ST.

Back in the late Eighties, there were a lot of budget publishers competing for your pocket money and labels such as Codemasters, Kixx, The Hit Squad and Mastertronic were already dominating that market. Naturally, we were intrigued to find out just what Darryl's strategy was to compete with these big hitters. "Well, we had different outlets to them, utilising places such as petrol station forecourts. But the normal distributors like Leisuresoft and Centresoft were always keen to help us too," he says. "We also had a great relationship with Woolworths and launched our exclusive *Bogie's Pick* range in there. So we always had a bit of a different angle to the others. Those guys went for the gamer market and we were pushing for the more casual purchaser. Granny's buying presents for grandsons and that type of thing." With this in mind, we were also keen to discover what Top Ten's bestselling games were, Darryl is happy to oblige with that information. "A few stood out! *Grid Iron* sold very



» [Amstrad CPC] *Vikings* is a very slick *Commando*-like game that was released for both the Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64.

> **"I don't think we did great numbers on BBC or Electron sadly, but I supported the format"**
> Darryl Still

well, this was when American football was breaking through on UK TV via Channel 4. The quality of the game was not that great, but it proved the concept that a good link worked wonders in the type of retail we sold in. *Deadenders,* which was an adventure game spoof of the famous BBC soap opera also had sales which did not fully reflect the quality of the actual game!" But did Top Ten ever hit the top ten? "We did chart a few times" Darryl proudly replies, "but we were more concerned with the budget charts where we always had a strong presence. *Orc Attack* from the old Thorn EMI licence was one of our bestsellers too, and it was also a pretty good game." A key question remains though, what was Top Ten's best game? "Probably our strongest title was *Dawnssley,* a top down *Gauntlet* type game that would have held its own at a higher price," Darryl boasts. "We used it to launch our Top Ten Hits label. *Heli Drop* on C64 was a really fun game too."

With neverending rivalry between 8-bit computer fans, Darryl reveals which was the better-selling format, "Spectrum was always the bestselling format" he confirms "with Commodore 64 hot on its heels. I don't think we ever did great numbers on BBC or Electron sadly, but I always supported the format because of my heritage at Audiogenic and great friendship with the likes of Peter Scott and Gary Partis." With a price point of just £1.99 it must have been pretty hard to turn a profit

DEFINING GAMES



DAWNSSLEY

ZX SPECTRUM, 1987

■ The game that launched the label, Paul Machacek's *Dawnssley* is a pretty unashamed clone of Atari's *Gauntlet* that features some big sprites and plenty of colour. Set across 27 different levels it even features several of the same characters! Supporting one or two players, the key to the game is finding special magic potions, then grabbing the keys and then finding your way to the exit. *Dawnssley* got Top Ten off to a very good start and rightly achieved some impressive sales over its lifetime. Paul Machacek would later go on to bigger and better things as part of the highly acclaimed Rare studio, a place where he still works to this day.



GRID IRON

ZX SPECTRUM, 1988

■ Okay, so we admit that *Grid Iron* isn't a particularly good game at all. The basic character-style graphics, stop-start gameplay and minimal sound effects don't exactly recreate the thrills of the Superbowl very effectively, however the game deserves a mention as one of Top Ten's most important titles. Released to coincide with the NFL craze generated by Channel's 4 new coverage of the sport, *Grid Iron* shot straight to the top of the charts and gave gamers a good entry point into understanding the American version of football. Originally for the ZX Spectrum; Electron, C64 and BBC ports would soon follow.



ORC ATTACK

ATARI 8-BIT, 1984 (ORIGINAL RELEASE YEAR)

■ A rerelease from Thorn EMI, *Orc Attack* is one of the earliest and best examples of tower defence, a genre that has become extremely popular with the rise of mobile gaming. You control a knight guarding the ramparts of the king's castle. The evil orcs are attacking the keep and using their ladders to scale the walls. The only weapon that you have at your disposal is the pile of heavy cannonballs stores in the castle. Grabbing one at a time you must use these iron balls to stop the enemy, knocking them off their ladders and squashing them into the ground. As a result of the simple, yet novel, concept *Orc Attack* is a highly compulsive game.





» [ZX Spectrum] Many people will remember fun trivia game *Snookered* from one of *Crash* magazine's bumper cover tapes.

on those sales, so we once again turn to Darryl to try and break down the figures: "To be honest, I let Martin worry about that side of things, I was more focussed on cranking out the product. But I suspect it was easier for Top Ten to make money than many other budget publishers as Maynard International owned its own cassette duplication plant. So the cost of goods was not so much of an issue and we didn't go large on our artwork costs, preferring to give exposure to talented young artists like Jolyon Myers than expensive industry figures. Of course, that had much more to do with our philanthropic tendencies than about profit margin!"

One of the most striking aspects of Top Ten's games was the unique artwork, it didn't even reuse the images from the full-price releases. The man behind these creations was the aforementioned Jolyon Myers. "The funny thing is that I didn't have a background in art, other than I knew from fairly young age that it was something I loved doing and that people seemed to appreciate it," the artist reveals. "My Father bought us an Oric 1 computer when I was 12 and a few years later he got the family a BBC Micro Model B. I'd always had a passion to do art and inspired by what I had seen on various games I wanted to try and draw pictures



FORBIDDEN FOREST

ATARI 8-BIT, 1983 (ORIGINAL RELEASE YEAR)

■ Paul Norman's classic *Forbidden Forest* has been talked about many times in the pages of **Retro Gamer**, so it almost goes without saying why it deserves a place on this list of defining games. Although original released by American publishers Cosmi Corporation, it was Top Ten which would pick the game up for its budget price rerelease. *Forbidden Forest* was actually one of the earliest games to feature an environment which changes from day to night. With its overall theme, combined with some pretty gory effects, it could also be acknowledged as a precursor to today's survival horror genre.



HELI DROP

COMMODORE 64, 1987

■ One of only a few C64 only releases by Top Ten, *Heli-Drop* is an excellent take on the classic *Choplifter.* But while there are numerous similarities, this game adds enough tricks of its own to make it more than just another clone. In *Heli Drop* you are tasked with delivering supplies to a chaotic warzone in your armed chopper. As you scroll along the landscape, looking for the drop points, enemy helicopters will try to take you out so you need to keep your wits about you. *Heli Drop*'s attractive visuals and fun gameplay make it exactly the type of game you would have been happy to spend your pocket money on.

TIMELINE

1975
■ Maynard International is founded as a Berkshire recording studio by Martin Maynard.

1979
■ The company signs a contract to do tape reproductions for Commodore in the UK.

1984
■ A deal to distribute the Koala Pad, an early drawing tablet, in Europe is struck.

1985
■ The failure of the peripherals business sees Maynard's original software label Audiogenic close its doors.

■ SuperSoft buy a controlling stake in Audiogenic as Martin Maynard loses interest in the videogames market.

1986
■ Peter Calver agrees to buy out Audiogenic completely leaving Maynard International to return to music production.

1987
■ Darryl Still forms Go-Dax to produce new games for the Atari ST and Acorn computers and rents space in Maynard International's building.

■ Martin Maynard persuades Darryl Still to launch a new budget label called Top Ten Hits under the Maynard International banner, alongside his own label.

1988
■ Darryl spends a huge amount of his time reproducing games for Atari UK at Maynard's tape plant and is eventually persuaded to join the juggernaut as product manager for the Atari ST.

1989
■ Martin Maynard loses interest with the videogames industry once again and returns to his music once more. He still runs his studio in Theale, Berkshire to this day.



on the computer, too. A friend of mine had typed in a program that could zoom in on a section of the screen and expand the pixels allowing me to place different coloured pixels using the keyboard. I had written a basic line-drawing tool and combined both programs to start creating images. I was 14 when I started doing my first freelance work, getting stuff published from that age. I sent some images to Superior Software and they got back to me about a week later asking me if I wanted to do loading screens for their games. Obviously, I said yes and my first professional work was for a game called *Syncron*. Then Darryl Still, who I believe was still with Audiogenic at the time, got in touch with me. I believe he had seen an article on me that was in a BBC computer magazine which had some of the images I had created."

We turn to Jolyon once more to ask if he was able to give a bit more insight into what his job involved. "I was still only around 15 or so when I started doing some art for Darryl at Audiogenic. Mainly, I continued to work with just the loading screens that appeared while the game loaded from tape or disk as this was a nice compartmentalised element that didn't really need me to be with a programmer. I think the first screen I did was for a game called *Ziggy*. Not long after doing those I started using the Commodore Amiga to do some cover art for the Top Ten, too, including a pretty cool *Joust* clone (*Skirmish*) and *The Peter Scott Trilogy*. They look so basic now (and not my finest work!) but at the time it was something different and exciting to make the cover using the Amiga." The big question is, though, did Jolyon actually play any of the games before putting pencil to paper and pointer to pixel? "As a person that was simply making loading screens I was in the fortunate position to just need to be sent the game that was near completion and then create an image based on what I had played. I was still technically a kid and it was great to be sent an early copy of a game that nobody in the general public had seen before! There was a time I did the Acorn Electron version of the graphics for a *Repton*-style game and that was just a case of modifying what had already been done and using the in game editor to do it. That was about the only time on the BBC Micro that I did anything other than a loading screen professionally." Given he got to play most of them, and is something of an expert on them, what was Jolyon's favourite Top Ten game? "I actually really liked the games on *The Peter Scott Trilogy* for the BBC Micro!" We are sure that Peter will be very pleased to hear that!

With all the history of the company complete we were interested to hear Darryl and Jolyon's favourite memories of working there. Jolyon was first to chip in with this career-shaping tale: "At school I was asked to

> **"I was still a kid and it was great to be sent an early copy of a game that nobody had seen"**
> Jolyon Myers



» [Atari 8-bit] Did you think endless runners were a new genre? Well, definitely not as Cosmi's *Aztec Challenge* proves.



» [ZX Spectrum] *Inspector Flukeit* was also known as *Flukeit & Blunders In The Kidnapping Of Professor Mundle*. It's not quite as catchy…

DNA OF TOP TEN HITS



PICK & MIX

■ Top Ten was keen to exploit any kind of untapped markets it could find, so as well as selling games from petrol forecourts it also produced special compilations to sit alongside the pick & mix in Woolworths. These value-for-money offerings were aimed specifically at parents and grandparents who were looking for a bargain when purchasing birthday and Christmas presents.



KILLER CONTACTS

■ Thanks to formally owning Audiogenic Software, Top Ten's parent company Maynard International still had a list of contacts within in the industry that most software companies would have been jealous of. This allowed Top Ten to not only tap this talent for new games but also license former full price products for rerelease at the pocket-money-conscious price of just £1.99.



SPREAD YOUR BETS

■ Publishing at a budget price also allowed Top Ten to take a few more risks and publish games for a wider variety of formats. Its vast catalogue contained games for the Acorn Electron, BBC Micro, Atari 8-bit, Sinclair ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST and Acorn Archimedes. This pleased fans of some of the lesser-supported computer formats greatly.



» [Atari 8-bit] Thorn EMI's *Tank Commander* and *Submarine Commander* were republished together on the same tape by Top Ten.



find somewhere to do a week of work experience. So, of course, I asked Darryl and he was gracious enough to let me spend the week at the office, which was great. It was my first experience of working in an office doing the job I love and it was a lot of fun. Commuting by train from my home town of Basingstoke to the outskirts of Reading made me feel like I was doing a proper job. I think I even bought myself a suitcase! My brother is now working nearby and he showed me a picture of the place and it still looks exactly the same!" Darryl wasn't finding it so easy to turn back time, "God, it was all so long ago, and when pitched against the slick operation that is Kiss Ltd. these days, we seemed to be always hitting milestones and order schedules by the seat of our pants. But doing this whole interview has triggered a lot of memories I'd not thought about for a very long time. I do remember we had a terrific camaraderie in the office. A bunch of young people having a laugh without much business savvy, but a lot of good intentions, just running on adrenaline and gut feel."

As the Eighties came to a close, things were starting to change at Maynard International. Martin had once again lost interest in the software industry and Darryl's talents were being wooed elsewhere. The end for Top Ten came about almost as quickly as it began, as Darryl laments.

"It seems with the benefit of years of hindsight that it all just drifted away. I remember that Martin had been growing more and more absent from the games side of the business. He had bought in a new business manager, who kind of manufactured a little internal coup, and I was becoming much more interested in the 16-bit side of things anyway. I was working more and more closely with Atari at this point, so I left in August 1988 to join them and became product manager for the Atari ST. I passed the Go-Dax label over to Martin and I think Top Ten ceased to be shortly afterwards. There were still some other titles in development when I sold Go-Dax to Martin, *Bolo* (by Delos D Harriman) and *Fireball*, both for the Acorn Archimedes, plus *Cyboto* for the BBC which was being killed off just as I left. I think there were a couple more, too, but I can't really remember!" Top Ten Hits' time in the industry might have been a pretty short one and it didn't really leave a big impression. But it did leave behind a lot of quirky and interesting games that really should be remembered. *

Special thanks to Darryl Still and Jolyon Myers.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

DARRYL STILL



■ When he decided to call it a day at Maynard, Darryl left budget games behind to take up a role as a product and marketing manager for Atari UK. While there he spearheaded the release of the Atari ST in the UK before launching the Lynx and Jaguar across Europe. Darryl is still working in the videogames industry today and is now CEO of Kiss, a digital distribution platform for indie games.

PAUL MACHACEK



■ After his time at Top Ten, Paul took to freelance coding – most notably producing isometric adventure *Super Hero* for Codemasters. It was this game that got him hired by Rare in 1988 where he remains to this day as the prestigious company's test manager. In his time at Rare he's been involed with titles such as *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Diddy Kong Racing*, and most recently the excellent *Rare Replay* compilation for the Xbox One.

JOLYON MYERS

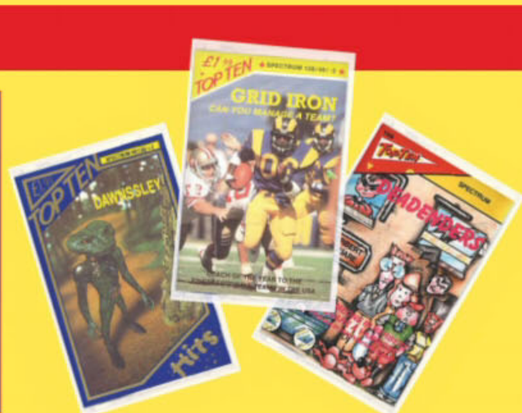


■ Since the days of Top Ten Jolyon's career has continued to climb. He first took up a role at Domark's development house The Kremlin before moving on for a brief stay at Argonaut Games. As of today, Jolyon now works as the Senior Designer at Infinity Ward – a company that needs no introduction, we're sure – where he has worked extensively on the *Call Of Duty* franchise.



A SHADE OF HUMOUR

■ A large slice of Top Ten's library actually consisted of that old 8-bit computer favourite, the text adventure. But rather than the usual more serious affairs, Top Ten's efforts always tried to inject a huge dollop of humour in to every single one. With satirical takes on the BBC soap opera *Eastenders*, *The Great Train Robbery* and even *American Werewolf In London* being produced.



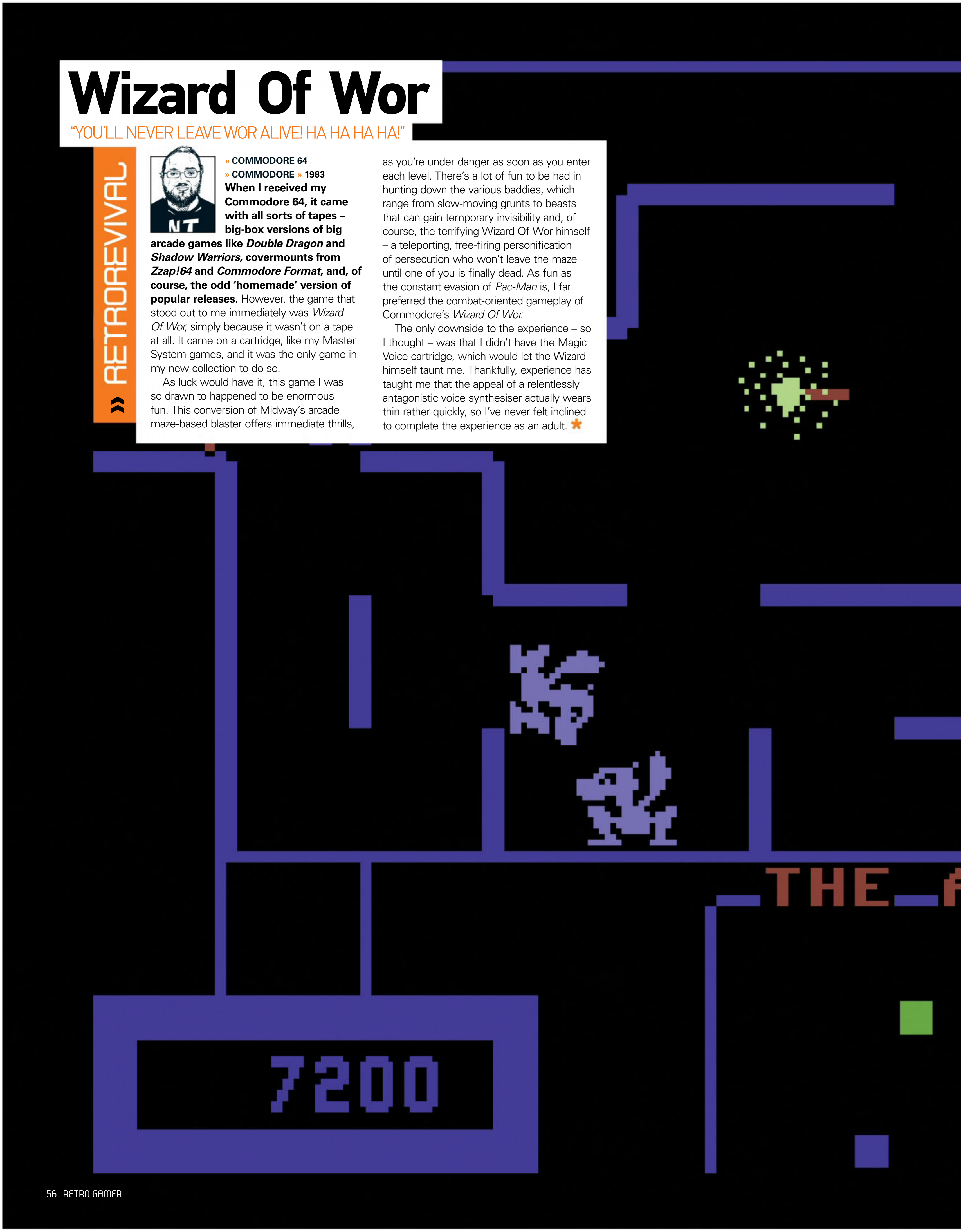
COVERS THAT YOU COULD JUDGE

■ Back in the day, it was common for people to choose games based on the cover art rather than any concept of how the game actually played. Top Ten was wise to this and so put every effort possible into making the cassette inlays for its games as attractive and intriguing as possible. It even redesigned covers from previous releases to better suit its own style and branding.



PRESS RECORD

■ One of the biggest advantages that Top Ten had over its rivals was that it had its very own tape reproduction plant, a legacy of being descended from a music recording studio. This enabled the team to make better margins than their rivals, hold less inventory and make orders on demand. This also allowed the company to have a nice sideline reproducing cassettes for other people too.



Wizard Of Wor

"YOU'LL NEVER LEAVE WOR ALIVE! HA HA HA HA!"

» COMMODORE 64
» COMMODORE » 1983

When I received my Commodore 64, it came with all sorts of tapes – big-box versions of big arcade games like *Double Dragon* and *Shadow Warriors*, covermounts from *Zzap!64* and *Commodore Format*, and, of course, the odd 'homemade' version of popular releases. However, the game that stood out to me immediately was *Wizard Of Wor*, simply because it wasn't on a tape at all. It came on a cartridge, like my Master System games, and it was the only game in my new collection to do so.

As luck would have it, this game I was so drawn to happened to be enormous fun. This conversion of Midway's arcade maze-based blaster offers immediate thrills, as you're under danger as soon as you enter each level. There's a lot of fun to be had in hunting down the various baddies, which range from slow-moving grunts to beasts that can gain temporary invisibility and, of course, the terrifying Wizard Of Wor himself – a teleporting, free-firing personification of persecution who won't leave the maze until one of you is finally dead. As fun as the constant evasion of *Pac-Man* is, I far preferred the combat-oriented gameplay of Commodore's *Wizard Of Wor*.

The only downside to the experience – so I thought – was that I didn't have the Magic Voice cartridge, which would let the Wizard himself taunt me. Thankfully, experience has taught me that the appeal of a relentlessly antagonistic voice synthesiser actually wears thin rather quickly, so I've never felt inclined to complete the experience as an adult. ✱


ARENA
0

The making of Hunchback

You must remember Hunchback. Surely his face rings a bell? Paul Drury talks rope swings and fiery pits with Peter Robinson, the man who brought Quasimodo to the arcade

As the summer sun beat down on Fort Lauderdale, two men were sitting on the beach. Their company, Century Electronics, had released a forgettable bunch of games since entering the coin-op market the previous year. The British company needed a hit before 1982 finished and it was already September.

"We started drawing out our game ideas in the sand," recalls Peter Robinson, cofounder and owner of Century along with David Jones, the other man on that Florida beach. "I'd been playing *Pitfall* on the Atari 2600 and I'd also seen a game called *Tarzan Boy*, which I think was later renamed *Jungle Boy*, at a small show. I thought a guy swinging on a rope was cute and quite novel but we didn't want a jungle theme for obvious reasons. Then we thought, Robin Hood!"



» [Arcade] Peter says the lance-prodding guards were 'inspired' by Irem's 1980 shooter *UniWar S*.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CENTURY ELECTRONICS
- » **DEVELOPER:** CENTURY ELECTRONICS
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

It proved to be a productive afternoon. They copied their sketches in the sand onto paper, complete with sun oil stains, and returned to England with a clear outline for what would become the company's biggest seller, *Hunchback*. Back in issue 151, we catalogued the history of the series and its appearances on 8-bit micros and now we can reveal the tale of how Robin Hood became Quasimodo and provided a rare British success story from the golden era of arcades.

Peter and David had incorporated Century Electronics in 1978, originally as a manufacturing company in those pioneering days of the coin-op business. "We started with a copy of *Space Invaders* called *Cosmic Invasion*," explains Peter. "The microprocessor it used was a 2650, which probably means nothing to you. It was the European effort by Philips to get a share of the lucrative and massively exploding micro parts market..."

The link with the Dutch company brought Century into contact with Mullard Components, Philip's UK subsidiary, a major supplier of capacitors, transistors and the various components required to create an arcade machine. At this point, the coin-op business was dominated by huge American and Japanese companies such as Atari and Taito, but having secured the backing of Philips and its





» [Arcade] With his damsel in sight, Quasimodo ponders if she looks like Maid Marian.

> "We started drawing out our ideas for Hunchback in the sand on a Florida beach"
> Peter Robinson

representative in Britain, Peter and David hatched an ambitious plan.

"It was the beginning of our 'Convertible Video System' or 'Century Video System' or just 'CVS', depending on who we were talking to," says Peter. "We got going on designing a convertible game system. David was a technocrat and did the detailed designs, with help of course, on a versatile sound board, a speech PCB and a powerful game PCB. I was more into coming up with the commercial ideas and the games themselves. It was a real learning curve."

It was a two-pronged attack from Century. Its system would allow arcade operators to easily change the game playing in a cabinet and also provide a development system to produce their own titles in-house. "Designing games was not an easy task," acknowledges Peter. "One must accept that one game will influence and inspire another."

True, though looking at the initial Century releases, the 'inspirations' are hardly disguised. *Space Fortress* is *Asteroids* in colour, *Radar Zone* is a mash-up of *Amidar* and *Qix* and *Wall Street* takes Game & Watch title *Fire* and swaps a burning building for a crashing stock market, as you attempt to save suicidal bankers leaping from their high-rise offices. *Hunchback*, too, clearly had



» [Arcade] Quasimodo has to move fast if he wants to avoid being scorched by the pursuing soldier, brandishing a burning torch.

Pitfall Harry as a role model but this time, Century tried to bring something new to the 'jump-your-way-from-A-to-B' gameplay.

"The first idea was Robin Hood getting about Sherwood Forest but [the trees] were a bit close to a jungle and we wanted to avoid that theme," explains Peter, "so in came the walls from the Sheriff of Nottingham's castle. The castellations provided obstacles to jump over and then the large pit with the rope swing was courtesy of Activision. Every coin-op game needs to have some sort of timer to stop you playing forever so we brought in the Soldier, who starts at the bottom of the wall and chases you to hurry you along. Then we added the 'killers'..."

As if dangling from ropes and leaping across battlements wasn't enough, poor Robin also faced an onslaught of deadly arrows from unseen archers and fireballs hurled from a giant trebuchet, positioned just off-screen. Castle guards were stationed on ▶

The bells! The bells!

Five of our favourite Hunchback clones

ROBIN TO THE RESCUE
COMMODORE 16



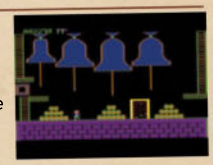
■ Reverting to the original theme of *Hunchback*, this has our hooded hero negotiating two layers of battlements with connecting ropes to scramble up plus keys to collect, much falling masonry to dodge and even a guillotine, presumably in a nod to Victor Hugo. Vive le difference!

PUNCHY
ZX SPECTRUM



■ Originally entitled *Hunchy*, before publishers Mr Micro thought that might give the game away and gave it a swift Punch And Judy makeover. It features some awful sampled speech and lackadaisical jumping from the domestic abuser, but we do like the floating sausage.

QUASIMODO
ATARI 800



■ This takes the *Hunchback* setting and swings it from the top of Notre Dame cathedral, adding siege-style stages where you cast boulders onto invaders, vertically-scrolling platform levels with giant bells and a final crossbow shootout. It's not really a true *Hunchback* clone, just a damn fine game.

THE GREAT WALL
ELECTRON



■ This initially appears to be a fairly standard *Hunchback* rip-off, albeit with jerky movement and the kind of garish colour scheme the Electron revelled in. Then you realise it offers 512 screens – they all turn out to be depressingly similar, as you probably guessed.

HUNCHBACK
BBC MICRO



■ An odd one this, in that it began as an unofficial clone released by Superior Software. Century's lawyers intervened and suddenly it became an officially-licensed arcade conversion and not a bad one, either, featuring an especially nimble Quasimodo bounding across the battlements.

More from Century

Century produced over a dozen coin-ops between 1981 and 1984…



COSMOS 1981

■ A fairly standard *Astro Blaster* pastiche with the usual array of antagonistic aliens to obliterate and an ever-decreasing fuel gauge. Century revisited the same space shooter theme later in the year with *Dark Warrior*.



LOGGER 1982

■ A shameless *Donkey Kong* rip-off, which swaps barrels, rivets, pies and indeed any other obstacles from the Nintendo original into logs and morphs Kong into some sort of giant flightless bird. It does feature *The Lumberjack Song*, though.



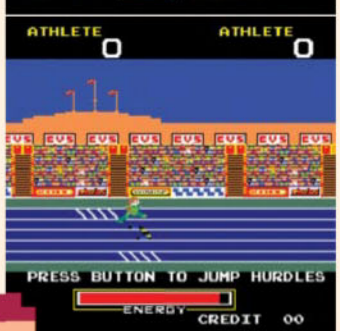
WALL STREET 1982

■ Though inspired by Game & Watch title *Fire*, this does at least try something different. Save suicidal stock brokers by bouncing them into an ambulance before taking on tanks in a daring bank raid. Based on a true story (probably).


» [C64] Ocean secured the official licence for home conversions of *Hunchback* and ended up acquiring the IP when Century folded.



» [Arcade] Quasimodo and Esmeralda returned in this disappointing *Tutankhamun* clone.



» [Arcade] *Hunchback At The Olympics*. Shouldn't that be Paralympics?

the walls, thrusting their lances upward at very inopportune moments, inevitably ending any romantic involvement with Maid Marion, the damsel our hero was intent on rescuing. All the elements for an action-packed platformer were in place and Peter and David set a team of three programmers and an artist on to the project, headed up by lead coder Harry Convey. Yet the game lacked a clear 'reward' for when Robin successfully reached the end of each screen.

"The bells were the trigger," smiles Peter. "Someone suggested using a bell sound [to indicate] you'd reached the right-hand side of the screen. The graphics guy said he could do a bell graphic quickly and so that was that sorted! Then a few weeks later, I was adding more screens to the game outline and I came up with four ropes in a line, which made me think of bell ropes and that led me straight to Victor Hugo and Quasimodo!"

A few strategically-placed pixels meant Robin became the Hunchback Of Notre Dame whilst Maid Marion swiftly morphed into Esmeralda. However, this rebranding didn't occur until December 1982, late in development, and with the game due to be presented at an industry show in Frankfurt in January, the team simply didn't have the capacity to rework



» [Arcade] The final screen is a homage to *Donkey Kong* with a number of bell-shaped rivets that need to be removed.

> "I completely dismissed the home market for Hunchback, which on reflection was really arrogant"
> Peter Robinson

all the graphics in line with the new narrative. "Time was against us," sighs Peter. "Many a day went into the next without us seeing the night but there just wasn't enough time to change all the graphics. So 'The Hunchback In Lincoln Green' he was and still is."

With the game in an almost-finished state, the team took it to Germany in January 1983 for the IMA exhibition. Although the number of European developers at the show was dwarfed by the American and Japanese giants, the team loved its *Hunchback* game and felt confident it would catch the eye of attendees. There were in for a surprise. "Players came to the stand, started the game… and then walked away after 30 seconds!" remembers Peter. "I stood behind a player and saw they were losing lives because they had no idea what to do! Back then, the first screen had three castellations and a fireball. The fireball would kill them instantly. Next life, they'd try to shoot it because they thought the button meant they had a gun! If they managed to jump over it, they'd lose their last life by falling down a castellation. They would walk off with a puzzled expression. We hadn't reckoned on [what it would be like for] someone seeing the game for the first time. Lesson learned."

Peter raced back to the UK and got his team to smooth out the game's learning curve. The opening screen was altered so it only had a single fireball to negotiate. Then came a fiery pit with no other hazards to avoid. Each element of the game was introduced so by the time the player was faced with fireballs being hurled at them from behind and volleys of arrows shot





DAZZLER 1982

■ A nod to *Donkey Kong Jr.* this time, with keys to collect and a caged beast to liberate, though set in a vulture-patrolled maze as well as on platforms. After *Hunchback*, probably Century's best coin-op.



RADAR ZONE 1982

■ If you've made a career out of copying other coin-ops, why not do three at once? This combines *Amidar*'s painting stage with elements of *Qix*, then throws in some *Asteroids* for good measure.



SUPER BIKE 1983

■ *Moon Patrol* gets the 'tribute' treatment this time as you trundle along pothole strewn roads, blasting balloons and skulls as you go. The cavern stages and Evil Knievel bus leaping provide some variety – but not much.



»Peter (right) and his business partner David Jones (left) in 1983, signing a lucrative deal on the back of *Hunchback*'s success.



» [Arcade] Jumps must be carefully timed to avoid the onslaught of fireballs and razor-sharp lances

at varying heights, they were well acquainted with the multiple threats that stood between them and rescuing Esmeralda. "We had just 11 days to make the changes before the ATE show in London at the end of January," chuckles Peter, "and just these small changes ensured its success. It became a hot game and it helped us sell a load of CVS kits and machines, too."

Hunchback was the hit Century had been seeking. The simple concept, the increasing complexity as multiple missiles entered the fray and the cute way Quasimodo could leap and change direction midair all added to the appeal. It even had a finale, which owed a debt to *Donkey Kong*'s Rivet Screen, before players were tasked with doing it all again but faster and with more deadly projectiles. After a deal with Centuri Inc fell through, Century began shipping *Hunchback* directly to the States at a bargain price, which further increased the success of its flagship title. *Hunchback* was certainly doing business in the arcades but Peter admits to overlooking another lucrative market.

"I completely dismissed the home market," he says. "I was making arcade machines with profits in the hundreds of pounds per sale and couldn't see the point of getting into the business of making [games on] cassette and selling them for a profit of 90p. This may seem arrogant and on reflection, it was! I got wind that Superior Software were making and selling a version of *Hunchback* for the BBC computer. I contacted Rubin Berg, our solicitor, and we issued a licence to them for a royalty of 20p per cassette sold. A few weeks later I got a call from Rubin asking me to go and meet with a new company called Ocean Software…"

Peter struck a deal with Dave Ward and Jon Woods, the founders of Ocean, and *Hunchback* became the company's first licensed title, appearing on virtually every home micro and topping many a game chart. Everything seemed to be chiming for Century Electronics in 1983 and yet by early 1984, the company went into liquidation. Peter believes several factors were to blame. The bootlegging of *Hunchback* boards by unscrupulous distributors affected sales, compounded by the downturn in the arcade business caused by the infamous mid-Eighties 'crash', plus Peter acknowledges that Century never produced a game of *Hunchback's* quality again – if you need proof, try playing the sequels *H.E.R.O.* (*Hunchback Esmeralda Rescue Operation*) and Hunchback at the *Olympics*.

As Century went into liquidation, Ocean secured the IP for itself. "Having the copyright [taken] like that left a bitter taste," admits Peter. "Why the *Hunchback* character was so popular is beyond me. I enjoyed the buzz of selling games but I was never really a player. Why did I design games? For the money!" *



Thanks to Keith Smith (bit.ly/allincolorforaquarter) and Martyn Carroll for their help.

Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED



SNES

Nintendo's 16-bit machine has such a strong library of games that many great games are passed over in favour of the obvious choices. Join Nick Thorpe for a look at some of the system's lesser-known gems…

IN DEPTH



EXTRA STRIKES
■ Hagane starts off with three hit points per life, but can gain an extra two through power-ups. Of course, if he loses a life he'll drop back down to the standard three.

HARD TARGET
■ Despite the presence of two giant samurai here, the actual target is this tiny monk who flies around the screen, occasionally firing projectile attacks at our heroic ninja.

EXTRA STRIKES
■ Unlike most games, all of Hagane's weapons are made available from the start of the game, and can be freely switched between at the touch of the X button. Be sure to choose wisely!

FLIP OUT
■ Thanks to his incredible acrobatics, a quick tap of a shoulder button will see Hagane backflip right out of the way of danger, with temporary invulnerability during the move.



HAGANE: THE FINAL CONFLICT

■ DEVELOPER: **CAPRODUCTION** ■ YEAR: **1994**

■ Is there any experience in gaming that compares to controlling a ninja? The agility and combat skills of a ninja mean that you can go on a power trip with such a character. However, the reality is that this agility often goes hand-in-hand with fragility, and all that stands between you and a grisly death is your own skill.

In the case of Hagane, he's much more than that – he's a cyborg ninja, revived to reclaim the Holy Grail from the evil Koma clan that slaughtered his Fuma clan allies in cold blood. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean that he's any less fragile than his fully-human compatriots, and that's going to become painfully apparent during *Hagane: The Final Conflict*. The titular hero has some incredible moves at his disposal – as well as high jumps, ground slides and lightning-quick swordsmanship, Hagane can perform a dazzling array of flips, wall-jumps and more in order to evade enemies and navigate the environment. However, this 2D platformer is no slouch in the difficulty department, so you're going to need to master every single one of the aforementioned skills to come out alive. Each of the game's dark, futuristic stages offers a major challenge, whether it's from regular swordsmen, aerial bombers or all manner of terrifying boss creatures. Crucially, there's plenty of variety on offer too – stages vary between regular platforming, auto-scrolling stages, boss fights and even an excellent Mode 7 section in which you need to avoid hazards while flying through a rotating ship.

Hagane: The Final Conflict is great to play, but does lack polish in a few crucial areas. The difficulty isn't just high, but somewhat uneven thanks to some dodgy enemy placement in certain areas – in particular, the first stage is rather harder than the one which follows it. The music is also pretty forgettable, consisting of bland Eastern-sounding tracks which never quite get the blood pumping in the way you'd hope for as you're slicing up legions of baddies. Still, these are minor criticisms in the grand scheme of things – it's a very good game even with these imperfections.

Unfortunately, *Hagane: The Final Conflict* is not easy to find, as it was released during the later life of the SNES and didn't fare well commercially. The game is expensive and even in its most common form, a loose Japanese cartridge, the game is likely to set you back over £60, with North American and PAL copies selling for substantially more than that. Worse yet, it hasn't seen a Virtual Console appearance or any other digital release. If you can swallow the cost, it's a compelling ninja platformer that is as close to the *Shinobi* series as you'll get on the SNES.



» [SNES] The game wastes no time throwing in the big guns – this gigantic multi-gun battleship is seen in the very first level.

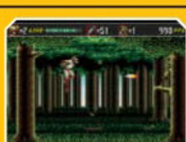


» [SNES] Thanks to the game's late release allowing for technical knowledge, gigantic enemies are fairly regular.

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

MEGA DRIVE



■ While Hagane has the edge in terms of skillset and arsenal, Joe Musashi's classic adventure is simply a more polished take on the same concept. With awesome music, crazy horseback and surfboard interludes and near-perfect level design, this is possibly the definitive 16-bit ninja platform game.

KAZE KIRI: NINJA ACTION

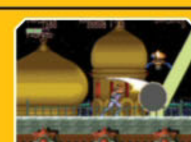
PC ENGINE CD



■ Much like *Hagane*, *Kaze Kiri* is a rare and expensive game featuring an incredibly agile ninja. It's perhaps not quite as good as its price tag suggests, but it's a stylish game that shows off NEC's hardware in a brilliant light – make sure to check it out if you ever get a chance, and decide for yourself.

STRIDER

ARCADE



■ If you need an agile ninja in your life and you haven't yet been introduced to Strider Hiryu, you need to rectify that error right now. Darran's favourite game features some incredibly memorable set-piece sequences, including the Politburo transforming into a boss and a breathtaking run down a mountainside.

Minority Report

PHALANX

■ PUBLISHER: **KEMCO** ■ YEAR: **1992**

■ If you're in North America, you'd be forgiven for missing *Phalanx* when it first hit store shelves – for some arbitrarily bizarre reason, the game's publisher, Kemco, foisted the game with some bizarre box art featuring an old bearded guy playing a banjo. What that has to do with a horizontally-scrolling space shoot-'em-up, we don't know.

For those who chose not to judge *Phalanx* by its cover, a very solid game awaits. It's a traditional shooter which puts the SNES hardware to good use in a genre that it isn't technically best suited to. Like many other games of its genre, *Phalanx* allows you to pick up a variety of weapons and power-ups that can quickly turn your tiny spaceship into an army of one, but punishes you upon death by stripping you of your existing gear. However, to make the fight a fair one, whenever you pick up a new weapon, the old one is put in stock for your next fighter to use when you lose a life – albeit at a lower power level.

The game shifts a surprising number of sprites around without the system slowing down, although they're not the largest enemies ever. Where the game shines is in its dynamic backgrounds, shifting from cloudscapes to futuristic cities with plenty of scrolling layers. In fact, background elements come into play often – in the first stage, far-off ships bombard you with fire, while the second has a central water section that makes good use of the console's ability to draw transparent objects.

Best of all, while *Phalanx* isn't easy, it's a pretty welcoming game for the many of you that won't have tried it as you start with a lot of lives, and you're allowed to take three hits before losing one.





» [SNES] *Phalanx* sports some rather nice background work, including this cloud formation with multiple scrolling layers.



» [SNES] Bosses in *Phalanx* aren't huge, but they do break down piece by piece as you pummel them in a satisfying manner.



» [SNES] This underwater section's visual effects wouldn't be possible on rival 16-bit systems, giving *Phalanx* a unique look.

MORE GAMES TO PLAY



» PLOK

■ DEVELOPER: **SOFTWARE CREATIONS**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ We've got a soft spot for the Pickford brothers' platforming hero – as well being attractive and decently challenging, *Plok* makes us happy just by cramming in a good amount of variety. Apart from the inventive puzzles that require Plok give up his limbs to use switches, we love searching for presents to get the chance to mess with Plok's powered-up forms. Who doesn't love a good flamethrower, after all?



» TETRIS ATTACK

■ DEVELOPER: **INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS**
■ YEAR: **1996**

■ Despite its name, *Tetris Attack* has nothing in common with Alexey Pajitnov's puzzle classic – but that's not to say it's a bad game at all. Coloured blocks constantly rise from the bottom of the playfield, and your only ability is to swap two spaces, in an attempt to make horizontal or vertical lines of three or more identical blocks. Despite the simplicity, there's a lot of scope to create combos that ruin things for your opponents.



» RUN SABER

■ DEVELOPER: **HORISOFT**
■ YEAR: **1993**

■ If you're the sort of person who likes *Strider*, *Run Saber* is exactly the sort of game you could find yourself falling in love with. You get to take control of an incredibly agile sword-swinging hero, capable of climbing most surfaces, sliding around and generally showing off. The game isn't shy about showing its influences, but some cool boss battles including excellent Mode 7 and multi-sprite ones will mean you don't mind.



» SATURDAY NIGHT SLAM MASTERS

■ DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
■ YEAR: **1994**

■ In an age when wrestling games were dull button-mashers, Capcom's arcade conversion was a breath of fresh air. Not only is it fast-paced and easy to pick up, the game includes fun weaponry, excellent finishing moves and even a familiar face in the form of *Final Fight*'s Mike Haggar. Even if you don't know Razor Ramon from Roman Reigns, multiplayer bouts should put a smile on your face.

LEGEND

■ DEVELOPER: ARCADE ZONE ■ YEAR: 1994



■ The medieval period provides a fertile ground for beat-'em-ups – combat typically took place at close quarters and there are plenty of myths to incorporate. As a result, it's hardly surprising that there are a few out there, and at first glance *Legend* may as well be *Golden Axe*. As you wander across each stage, your goal is to hack up bad guys with your sword, facing off against occasional bosses and collecting items to refill your health and build up special magical attacks.

But while there are no bizarre creatures to ride or dwarves to kick, *Legend* manages to differentiate itself from similar games with a more considered approach to combat. Your hero isn't fast on his feet and his combo attacks are cumbersome, but he can turn around during an attacking sequence and is able to block by using the shoulder buttons. As a result, where other beat-'em-up protagonists would be surrounded and beaten to death, *Legend*'s heroes have options. The addition of blocking also makes boss battles interesting, as you'll need to stand your ground sometimes.

While it doesn't offer a tremendous amount of variety, *Legend* is well worth a look for anyone after a solid co-op brawler with a twist.

“Your hero isn't fast on his feet and his combo attacks are cumbersome”



» [SNES] The flying kick is one of the few moves in *Legend* that allows you to move at a high speed.

RETRO STINKER

» BILL LAIMBEER'S COMBAT BASKETBALL

■ DEVELOPER: HEWSON CONSULTANTS ■ YEAR: 1991

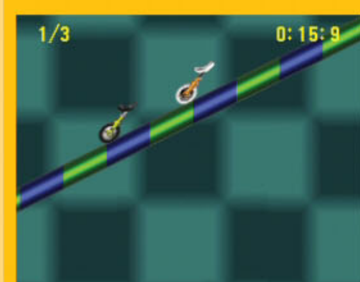
■ This futuristic basketball game has a bizarre endorsement which is only slightly less baffling than its control scheme, which inexplicably uses just one of the SNES pad's buttons.



» LUFIA & THE FORTRESS OF DOOM

■ DEVELOPER: NEVERLAND
■ YEAR: 1993

■ It can be hard for an RPG to stand out on the SNES amongst the abundance of classics from the likes of Squaresoft and Enix, but *Lufia* and its sequel are excellent takes on the genre. The story concerns your attempts to thwart the ambitions of the Sinistrals, a group of beings determined to bring the world to its knees, some time after they were first defeated by four legendary heroes.



» UNIRALLY

■ DEVELOPER: DMA DESIGN
■ YEAR: 1994

■ High-speed stunt racing action is the name of the game here, as you ride your unicycle through a variety of racing and stunt courses. Performing tricks such as flips and spins will increase your speed, but wiping out by landing wrong will slow you down. Unfortunately, a legal dispute with Pixar stopped production of the game, preventing *Unirally* from achieving the high sales such a simple but addictive game could have enjoyed.



» METAL WARRIORS

■ DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS
■ YEAR: 1995

■ Taking a great deal of inspiration from NCS's *Assault Suits* series, most notably *Assault Suits Valken*, *Metal Warriors* is a 2D platform game that allows you to take control of a powerful mech suit to defend Earth against the evil Dark Axis. Your mech can launch various attacks, and unlike many similar games, you don't have to go down with your vehicle – you can eject at any time and try to find a new mech to finish the fight.



» WEAPONLORD

■ DEVELOPER: VISUAL CONCEPTS
■ YEAR: 1995

■ This gory weapon-based fighting game is somewhat divisive – for some players, the slow animation and esoteric move inputs completely ruin the experience. However, fans point to *Weaponlord*'s innovative attacks and complex parrying system as reasons to love the game. If you're a hardcore fighting game fan looking for something different in a 16-bit fighter, give this a try, but genre novices should definitely look elsewhere.

GAME GENIE

With this dastardly device, players could smash game code open and not only give themselves an advantage, but make a host of fun tweaks. David Crookes takes a look at Codemasters' revolutionary tool…



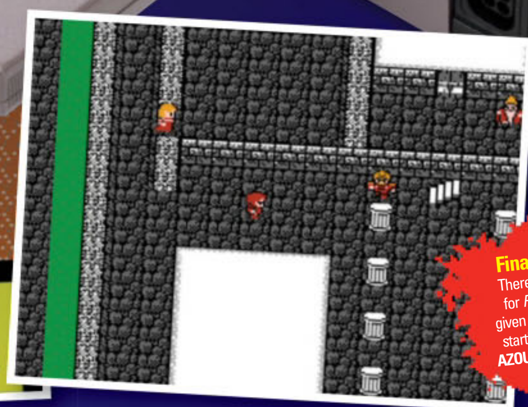
They say cheats never prosper, but when it comes to gaming that isn't always strictly true. Cheats can make scores appear more impressive or give access to certain features that normally demand hard graft. But while you could argue the old cliche that you're only cheating yourself, fiddling around with games to make them easier to play or expand their capabilities has almost always been a part of the enjoyment of gaming.

You only have to look back over old magazines to see how important cheating has been to players over the years. Pages upon pages would be dedicated to various tomfoolery. There would even be slices of code you could type in before running a game that would give infinite lives or various powers. Devices were also created to allow for the use of cheats: the Multiface





Operation Wolf, *NES*
Die hard. Alternatively don't die at all. The code **AESSLZTL** will keep you going until the bitter end in *Operation Wolf.*



Final Fantasy *NES*
There are loads of codes for *Final Fantasy*. We've given our heroes a 800 gold starting boost by inputting **AZOUGAEP** and **LAOUIAPA**.

> **"We were always trying to think about what we could add that was new to players"**
> David Darling



» [NES] Get loads of money and full equipment when you use the code TEKTYGAA in Ivan 'Ironman' Stewart's *Super Off-Road.*

by Romantic Robot being a prime example. Indeed, developers took glee in pushing their audience's skill to the limits and, for many, using cheats was pretty much the only way to see the end of a game.

Codemasters certainly came to think so. In 1989, the company's cofounder David Darling visited CES in Las Vegas with his brother Richard and talented engineer Ted Carron. They couldn't fail to notice that Nintendo had a major presence and its NES was proving to be very popular with visitors. "We had been in the industry for ten years and we loved making games," says David. "We knew how massively Nintendo was taking off, especially in America where they sold 23 million *Super Mario Bros.* carts."

When the trio arrived back in the UK, they were determined to break into this potentially lucrative market. They promptly headed over to David's flat. "We used to have brainstorming sessions in my apartment every month where we'd come up a new game idea or look at how we could make a game better by adding a new feature or whatever," says David. "We were always trying to think about what we could add that was new to players. So, on this occasion, Richard, Ted and I were thinking about what we could do with NES games. We'd already decided to release *Treasure Island Dizzy* for the console and create our own cartridges because we couldn't get a licence from Nintendo, but we thought we could modify the cart and add extra features."

The idea was to create a system that would allow players to make a game as hard or as easy as they wished – less a cheat system and more of a 'modifier'.

"Normally, if you buy a car or house or whatever you are allowed to modify it," says David. "We thought the players would like to make changes to their games." So to start with, David, Richard and Ted added physical knobs to the *Treasure Island Dizzy* cartridges intending them to be used by gamers to adjust and set the number of lives in the game. "There used to be controllers that offered slo-mo and rapid fire that would have switches to determine how fast they went," explains David. "So we thought we could put a switch on cartridges to give more lives or change the game. If it was a racing game, we were planning to allow gamers to use these switches to make the car go faster. That was our thinking."

Bubble Bobble, *NES*
You have to keep your wits about you when you input **LANEAGPA** + **NNEEAKSN** since the monsters move furiously fast.

The idea expanded rapidly. Rather than add switches to the *Treasure Island Dizzy* cart, Codemasters reckoned it could produce a system that would allow the functionality of all NES games to be altered by the player. The hurdle was trying to find a way to modify the ROM. At first, the team didn't think the feat would be possible, but it realised that the ROM didn't have to be changed – it could somehow trick the process instead.

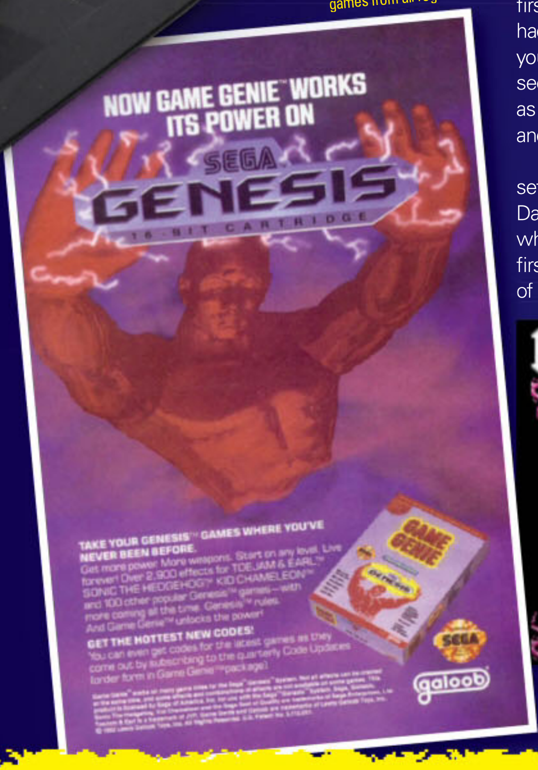
Ted, who worked on the device with a friend called Chris from his home in Middlesborough, figured that the product would need to sit between the game cartridge and the console. When the machine asked



» [Game Boy] If you fancy turning dogs in *Mickey's Dangerous Chase* into fire hydrants, then use the codes 3ECB3D6E2, 03CB4D802 and 06CB6D6E2.



» The Mega Drive version of the Game Genie featured the added bonus of playing games from all regions.



for data, Codemasters' device would allow the request through, but intercept the information flowing back from the cartridge. By doing this, it could make alterations to the data. Rather than tell the console that a player could only have three lives, for instance, it could grant them an infinite number. All the device had to do was swap one bit of data with another.

"It was complicated," David says. "It was a combination of hardware and software and we ended up producing different prototypes." The first prototype was a mass of wires and dials. "We had dials which you turned for the address or data you were trying to change. It was basic but we were seeing if the prototypes could recognise the information as it was transferring from the cartridge to the console and whether it could intercept and change it."

In some sense, it was like a combination lock. "You'd set the addresses that you wanted to change," concurs David. But it was quite a learning curve for Codemasters which had cut its teeth making budget games. "The first stage was fiddly to use and it was limited in terms of the amount of information it could deal with: you could only change one or two bytes," David adds. "We were just trying to prove that it was possible."

> **"We patented the idea of intercepting information as it went between the cartridge and the console"**
> David Darling



» [NES] Input SZNPVOVK into *Cybernoid* to enjoy an infinite number of bombs. Insert AZUALZGO and AXEXIPGO to start with double bombs.

To aid development, Ted and Richard moved to Taiwan for a couple of months, working with people who could make and design the chips as they readied it for mass manufacturing. Meanwhile, other people were drafted in to assist in the UK, with development taking place over the course of six months. The product allowed gamers to insert a game cart to the device and place it firmly into the cartridge slot of the console. The Codies originally called it the Power Pak (simply because Nintendo called its carts the Game Paks), and by this stage the dials had disappeared. They had been replaced by a simple, user-friendly graphical interface.

The task of creating this interface fell to coder Andrew Graham and the remit was simple enough. Since the idea of the Game Genie was to get players to use codes that would offer unlimited lives, faster speeds, infinite ammo and all sorts of other goodies, he had to produce an easy-to-use front-end input screen. He wrote the program using 6502 assembly language over the course of a month after the hardware had been designed and he kept it simple. Players would move a cursor around the screen, selecting the code characters.

The only problem was that Andrew had just 4KB to play around with. "The easiest way to eat up memory is with graphics," he explains. "To include a character set for text, we would have needed at least 8KB – double

ESSENTIAL CHEATS

We look at five rock-hard NES games and how the Game Genie managed to improve on them



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

■ The electric seaweed in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* proved mightily frustrating, thanks to tricky controls and the need to defuse every bomb. Some have called it the most stressful videogame level of all time, so it's rather handy to be able to input **SXVZGSOO** and gain invincibility to breeze through the level.



BATTLETOADS

■ If you've played *Battletoads*, then you'd know how difficult it is to progress, especially when it came to the Turbo Tunnel bike stage that is known for being notoriously hard, having you dodging and jumping walls. Codes will let you start on any level you fancy, while inputting **GXXZZLVI** will grant infinite lives.



SUPER MARIO BROS.

■ Okay, *Super Mario Bros.* is not unbeatable, but you can enhance the NES game by typing **APZLGK** and having Mario jump incredibly high from a standing start – perfect for avoiding nasties and just having a whole load of fun. **TPZLTG** is great for jumping very high, when running this time, and try **IKAAE** for something special.



FIFA International Soccer, *Mega Drive*
Fancy getting some rugby-type scores? **GBVADAZY** turns each goal into eight.

the amount of ROM to 8kB which would have made the device more costly." To get around this and keep the UI within 4KB, Ted had come up with a clever way to avoid using any character ROM whatsoever.

"By a cunning arrangement of on-chip logic, the electronics within the Game Genie presented the NES graphics chip with what appeared to be a set of 16 characters. By using these logic-generated characters I effectively had a low resolution display, where each 'pixel' was four times bigger than normal NES pixels. In this way I drew the big text characters and the explosion 'particles' and so on. I was able to use these characters for background graphics and for sprites."

The system was complete and it became known as the Game Genie. "We patented the idea of intercepting the information as it went between the cartridge and the console because we felt it was a very good idea," says David. "All that was left to do was find a host of codes that could be used for the system and make them known to gamers. To do this, Codemasters asked its developers to search for them, the idea being that codes would then appear in magazines and books (a booklet was bundled with the Game Genie device itself) as well as a quarterly update, a phone hotline and through adverts.

Each NES cartridge stored pieces of data in a series of locations which would be discovered via trial and error. The information would determine the attributes of the game, be it the number of lives, the height characters could leap, the proliferation of enemies and so on. By altering a variable byte value, the game could be altered.

"We might find a place in the code where it gives three lives to the player," explains Andrew. "So a good cheat would be to specify the address of

Street Fighter II, *SNES*
You can have a sharp bout by ensuring a player can be defeated with just two blows. Type **503E04DF**.



NINJA GAIDEN

■ This is another toughie thanks to some punishing enemies and restart points. Rather than give up, the Game Genie can work its magic. Infinite lives are possible with **SZETPGVG** while the shuriken can be used without losing spiritual strength (**AAVTNYLA**) – this should be enough to see you progress.



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

■ Players die when they are hit twice in *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and, given the amount of enemies and firepower you have to contend with, it can make for a very short game. There are more lives available with Game Genie codes (**SZEGNOVK** for infinite) but it's good to slow the game down, too (**GAKILZLA**).

SEE YOU IN COURT

Other examples of Nintendo taking the battle to the courtroom…

NINTENDO *VS* TENGEN

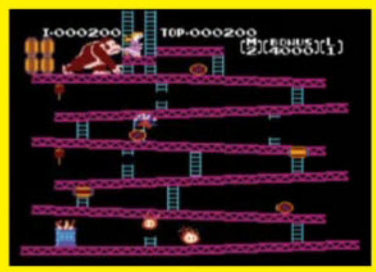
VERDICT: **NINTENDO WIN**

■ Nintendo sued Atari for copyright and patent infringement when the Atari division Tengen was found to have copied Nintendo's lock-out system, the 10NES. It had acquired the designs from the United States Copyright Office with the intention of producing however many unlicensed games for the NES that the company wanted. Judges backed Nintendo and the matter was settled out of court.

NINTENDO *VS* BLOCKBUSTER VIDEO

VERDICT: **NINTENDO WIN (SORT OF)**

■ Nintendo failed in its attempt to prevent Blockbuster from renting out NES games which were said to be losing the publisher money, so it decided to try a different angle. It sued the video rental firm for photocopying Nintendo's manuals in at least one store and three franchises in New Jersey, which forced Blockbuster to stop the practice. Blockbuster responded by creating its own instruction materials instead.



UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS *VS* NINTENDO

VERDICT: **NINTENDO WIN**

■ The presence of the iconic gorilla upset Universal Studios. It accused Nintendo of ripping off the story and characters from *King Kong* – but the movie studio had previously (and successfully) argued *King Kong* was in the pubic domain in a case against RKO. Nintendo picked up on that and the judge ruled in its favour.

ALPEX COMPUTER CORPORATION *VS* NINTENDO

VERDICT: **NINTENDO WIN**

■ Alpex, a company which filed for bankruptcy in 1985, sued Nintendo for patent infringement in a case which rumbled on for more than a decade. It centred on the creation of the NES and the "means for generating video signal". Alpex secured early victories and was awarded damages totalling $253,641,445 at one point. But Nintendo appealed each decision and eventually emerged victorious. ■

BENDING THE RULES

Codemasters' Game Genie wasn't the only cheat device around…



PRO ACTION REPLAY

■ The Pro Action Replay was made available for many consoles over the years. It not only allowed players to benefit from prediscovered infinite lives, extra fuel, unlimited energy and other such cheats, it also let them use the device to find their own.

XPLODER

■ These carts and discs have been launched for a large number of consoles including the PlayStation, Game Boy Advance and Game Boy. The PlayStation version, released in 1998, allowed burned copies of games to be played on the console, although its primary use was, of course, for cheating in games.



GAMESHARK PRO

■ With the GameShark Pro, it was possible to save codes in the memory of the cart, rather than have to keep entering them, which saved the hassle of having to keep a written note of the cheats. The cartridges doubled as memory cards, and it was possible for gamers to find their own codes.

CODE BREAKER

■ Another competing cheat device, Code Breaker was released for the PlayStation and GBA among others. It had thousands of preloaded codes that would gives extra vehicles and weapons as well as enhanced health, ammo and much more. It had the advantage of being able to accept the readily-available Game Shark codes.

▶ that place in the code, and replace the value '3' with the value '100'." He says the obvious way to present that cheat to the player would be in hexadecimal which is how programmers do it. "A four-digit hexadecimal value would cover the address space of the 6502 processor, and a two-digit hex code can specify any value of the byte," he says. So a cheat that changed the number of lives could end up looking like "$3dfe $64". "This is not how we presented a cheat in the original Game Genie, though."

That's because this approach was deemed too difficult to remember. Codemasters wanted codes to be alphabetical. "There were to be no numbers," says Andrew. "Ted hoped the codes would form 'words' that would be easier to remember and could even be seen as spells or incantations. That fitted in nicely with the 'three wishes' Game Genie concept."

"There were a few very common codes that players wanted for games: number of lives and level select," says Jon Cartwright, one of the many developers used by Codemasters to 'look' for codes. "The process of



» [NES] If you just want to blast away, having unlimited firepower in *Metroid*, simply punch in SZUILUVK.

> **"Ted hoped that the codes would form 'words' that would be easier to remember"**
> Andrew Graham

finding them was similar, so let's say you start with three lives in a game. What we'd do is use the logic analyser to trap any writes of '3' into RAM and then press the Start button or whatever. Now, there might be a bunch of places it wrote '3' for all sorts of reasons, so we'd have to go through them, one by one, changing the '3' to '99' or whatever then running the game again to see if you started with 99 lives. If we worked out where in RAM the lives value was, we could then try to find when that lives value was decremented. If we could find the code that decremented lives when you died, then we could kind of block it out so you never lost any lives. It wasn't always possible, so some games just ended up with a code that gave you lots of lives instead.

"Level select was similar, but more time-consuming to find. We'd assume that a game started on level one, so, similar to the lives code, we'd try to find a '1' getting written into RAM. But sometimes coders would actually start at level '0'. So we had mixed results with this one, some games had branching level structures, and the level numbers weren't necessarily contiguous. With some, we even found we could use the level select code to skip the entire game and go straight to the





» Codemasters planned a Game Genie 2 for the SNES, which would also save high scores but it never materialised.



Donkey Kong Country, *SNES*
The device could even alter the difficulty. Input **0CC13D6D** and **08C134AD** or **0CC9340D** and **08C13D6D** for the SNES classic.

ending. With some of the games that weren't so good, this was arguably the best code we found."

Despite such advances, Codemasters found it difficult to get Nintendo's support. It tried to speak to the company at CES but because Codemasters didn't have an appointment, it was rebuffed. Codemasters decided to go it alone and in order to capitalise on the North American market, it licensed the device to a Canadian company called Camerica which had been founded in 1988 by David Harding as a giftware wholesale.

David Harding had seen the potential for console gaming and he asked Codemasters if he could show the Game Genie to a toy company, called Galoob, in San Francisco. Camerica told the US rights to Galoob which approached Nintendo Of America for an official licence. It didn't get one. Instead, NOA sought to stop people buying the device. "Just before Galoob was about to launch the Game Genie, while they were in the process of marketing it, they were given a temporary retraining order from the courts which is like an injunction to stop them selling it," David says. Suddenly, the Game Genie's future was up in the air.

It only got worse. Even though Nintendo's injunction was lifted after a year, it was determined to clamp down on the device and it sued Galoob, claiming the Game Genie was, in modifying NES games, creating unauthorised derivative works. Nintendo argued it was an infringement of copyright but Galoob and Codemasters were adamant no laws or rules had been broken. "Nintendo had controllers that would make the game go into slow motion or fire weapons quickly – products that affected the games," David argues.

Paperboy, *NES*
Have fun chucking as many newspapers as you wish in *Paperboy* with the infinite paper cheat **OZNOKAVK**.



» [SNES] In *Killer Instinct*, entering the master code 3C61D4DF and then, separately, EEC134AF will ensure player one sustains all of the damage.

Galoob fought hard, telling judges that the modifications were temporary and that only a small number of changes could be made at the same time. Since games modified by the Game Genie couldn't be sold in their altered state because the changes couldn't be saved, US judges found it difficult to rule in Nintendo's favour.

"The judge said there were quite a few arguments for why changing the rules within a game was legal," says David. "The main one was that what was being done was temporary. It's like if you write a book: you own the copyright and you are the only person authorised to make copies of it. But in the old days, another person could write a sequel if they wished and that wasn't seen to be fair – it was said that only the original person had the rights to do this. So when Nintendo was saying a player modifying a game was making a new version as a derivative work, the fact is that it wasn't permanent and the altered games were not being published. When you unplugged the Game Genie, all of the changes disappeared."

With Nintendo losing the case, Galoob turned the tables and sued for damages. The court found in December 1991 that Galoob's losses were more than $15 million and ordered Nintendo to pay that amount, plus legal fees. By the beginning of 1993, 2.5 million Game Genies had been sold for the NES. It was a major triumph, paving the way for versions on other consoles.

A version was released for the SNES and another came out for the Game Boy but it only worked properly with the original version. The Mega Drive version came with a bonus – it could play carts from other region. Another was produced for the Game Gear.

"Sega took a different stance," says David. "It gave Galoob a licence for Game Genie and it was much more open." For each device, the fundamental system was retained but they had different plastic mouldings, bespoke chips and tailor-made software."

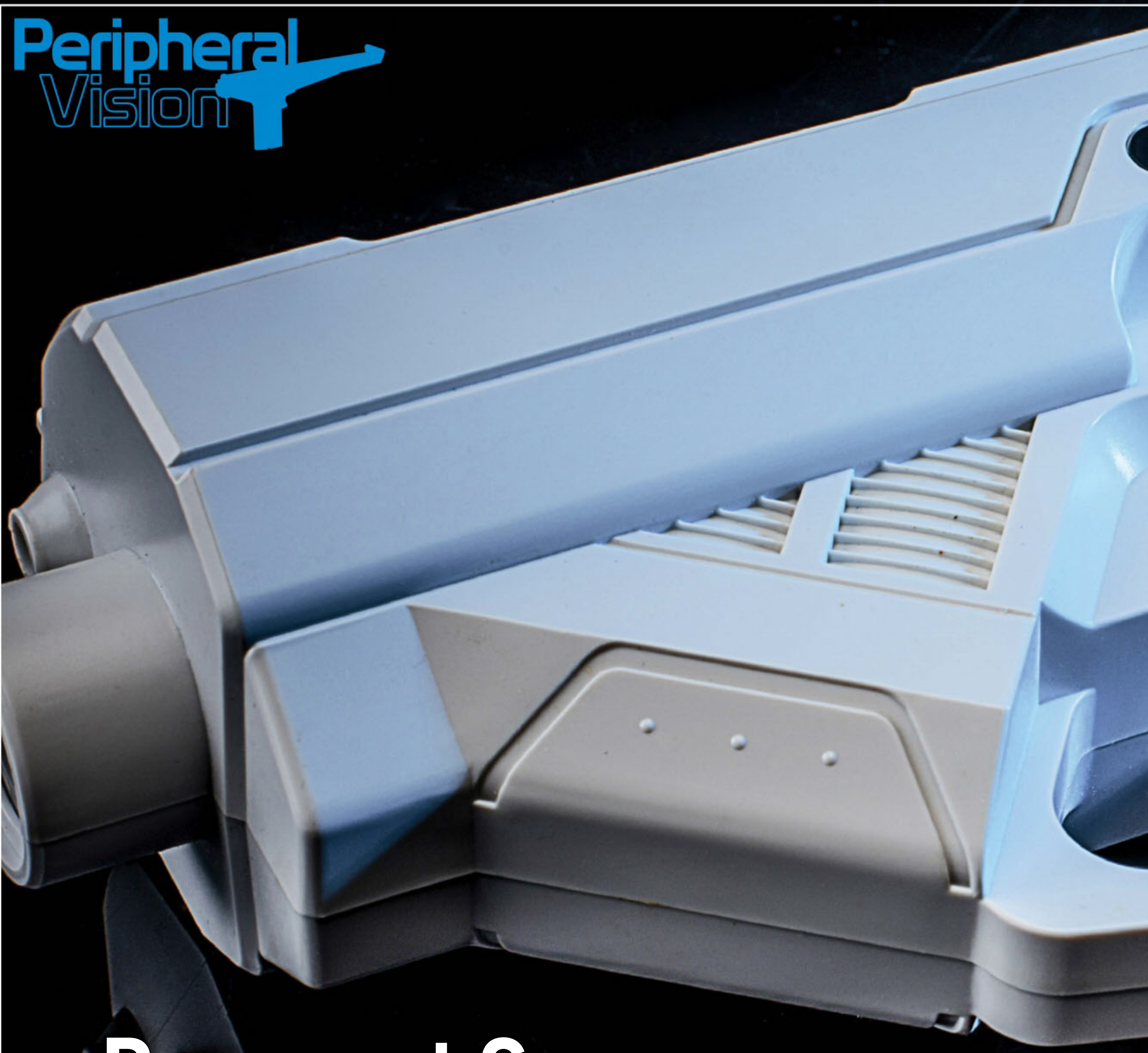


» [SNES] You can reduce tyre wear when you play *Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing* by inputting the codes C96B1705 and C9B14D61.

In 1993, a new device was devised for the SNES, called the Game Genie 2, which would have allowed gamers to find their own cheat codes while saving high-scores on the device. It would have allowed gamers use of the game controller to activate cheats but it was never released since the 16-bit market was moving on and David Galoob (then-president of Galoob) had left his company. It meant the Game Genie stopped production with the fourth generation of consoles until the brand was revived by Hyperkin for newer machines, but codes for older machines are still being discovered. Gamers have found real power in the Game Genie and its ability to alter and 'break' titles: you can find new surprises on YouTube Channels such as SolarEclipseOfficial.

"I have no regrets," summarises David Darling, who still makes games for his new company Kwalee, including the quiz maker *PlayPhoto* for iOS, but saw sales of five million for Game Genie devices. "We really believed in the product, we tried to invent something that was a good idea and we patented it. There's no doubt that we really wanted to follow through with it and we were pleased with how it turned out."

Peripheral Vision



Dreamcast Gun

» PLATFORM: DREAMCAST » RELEASED: 1999 » COST: £54.99 (LAUNCH, WITH THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2), £10+ (TODAY)

As the only arcade manufacturer left in the console hardware race, it was inevitable that Sega was going to release a gun for the Dreamcast – after all, the very first game released using Dreamcast technology was *The House Of The Dead 2* on the NAOMI arcade board. The same gun accompanied the Dreamcast Gun at its own launch, a few months into the system's Japanese life and at launch elsewhere. Unlike previous console lightguns, the Dreamcast Gun offered a slot for Dreamcast accessories (typically occupied by a VMU), as well as a D-pad and buttons for easy menu operation. Scant support followed, unfortunately, with a paltry total of six games released for the peripheral.

Unusually, the Dreamcast Gun is region-locked. While the European and Japanese markets both received the gun, Sega Of America decided to pass up on it. This decision was made due to concerns over adverse media coverage, in the wake of the shooting at Columbine High School in April 1999. To demonstrate the lack of support further, the official Dreamcast Gun is incompatible with North American Dreamcast releases. Thankfully, third-party alternatives are available – the Dream Blaster served as Sega's officially-branded lightgun in the region. ✱

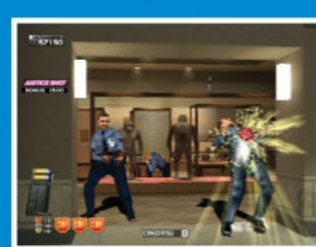


Dreamcast Gun fact

■ The most obscure game to work with the Dreamcast Gun is *Demolition Racer: No Exit*, a combat racing game that offers the 'Big Car Hunter' minigame as a side attraction for owners of lightguns.

ESSENTIAL GAME Confidential Mission

It's *Bond* spoof time, as the tuxedo-clad secret agent Howard Gibson and his female counterpart Jean Clifford try to stop the terrorist group Agares from hijacking a satellite. This is similar to the *Virtua Cop* series, with the same targeting system that shows how soon enemies will shoot. It's a straightforward, but smartly-executed, take on the genre, with a little spice added by the challenges sprinkled throughout the game – for example hitting a moving target with a single shot, or dealing significant damage to a single target against a time limit.



TODD'S ADVENTURES IN SLIME WORLD

This gooey adventure was one of the brightest moments in the Atari Lynx's early years, and it introduced eight-player gameplay to the handheld. Kieren Hawken wipes off the puddles of goo to uncover Todd's story

Over the years, the Atari Lynx has pretty much become regarded as a handheld arcade machine. In fact, the quality of its coin-op conversions is so well known that sometimes people forget about some of its more original titles. The earliest plan for the console was that while Atari would concentrate on producing these arcade conversions, along with its own IPs, Lynx designer Epyx would create great new, original titles as a first-party developer. Unfortunately, this relationship would soon go sour when Epyx was forced into administration, but more than a few good games still came out of the deal. *Blue Lightning* was an excellent launch title that was effectively Epyx's take on the popular arcade game *After Burner,* while *ElectroCop* put you in the role of a robotic cop who had to run around an enemy complex hacking terminals and shooting robots. *California Games* was a slick adaptation of the popular 8-bit alternative sports game that featured less levels than other versions, but far more impressive effects, while *Chip's Challenge* was a fantastic tile-based puzzle game that was created by Chuck Sommerville and later ported to all manner of other systems due to its immense popularity. By far the most ambitious project Epyx created for the Lynx, though, was *Todd's Adventures In Slime World,* an utterly huge arcade adventure that allowed you to explore worlds and collect the gems that resided there. In terms of original games on the console, it's easily one of its best and highlights just how capable Atari's system was.

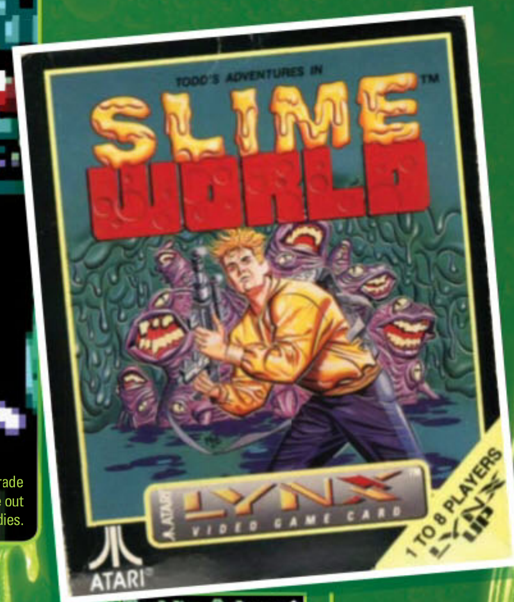


» [Lynx] The animated intros before each level are particularly noteworthy.

The man behind *Slime World* was Peter Engelbrite, who had previously brought the technically-impressive, yet ultimately flawed, shoot-'em-up *Gates Of Zendocon* to Atari's high-powered console. First of all, we were



» [Lynx] The triple-shot upgrade makes it far easier to take out rooms full of baddies.



> "We originally called Comlynx 'Redeye', as it was an infra-red communication system"
> Peter Engelbrite

keen to find out how he came up with the whole idea for the game. "I saw that many of the movies for kids around that time had at least some slime in them," Peter begins. "It seemed to be the current craze. So the concept was to provide a game that would make kids go 'eww', but doesn't have the blood and guts that parents would object to. Well, that and a lifetime of post-nasal drip. The original pitch I made to Epyx even used toilet paper rolls for the life counter." The premise of *Slime World* was not its only original feature, far from it, actually, as the game included a number of notable innovations that made it stand apart from other handheld games of the time. The first of these was the ability to Comlynx up to eight systems together for an insane multiplayer mode (providing of course, you could find seven other Lynx owners with a copy of the game). No other Lynx game would ever match this feat and it is, in fact, credited as being the very first eight-player co-op videogame. Peter is eager to explain the origins of Comlynx and how it enhanced Todd's adventure. "We originally called Comlynx 'Redeye', as it was an infra-red communication system," he begins, "but we soon scrapped that because the players would keep walking between the beams and disrupting the gameplay. So we found that there were primarily two ways to do multiplayer games via a cable instead. Firstly, you can transmit all the information about the state of the game (slow, but stable). Or you can transmit just the control actions (much quicker and even more stable), which was what I did. You do have to be careful with any randomly-generated items, though, or else you get out of synchronisation and it all goes wrong. We found the maximum number of players you could do this with



» [Lynx] With barely a spec of Todd not covered in deadly slime, this pool of water couldn't be better placed!

while staying stable was eight." This explained how it all worked, but how proud was Peter of the achievement? "I'm extremely proud of it, especially with it being the first eight-player home videogame in the world, unless someone knows of an earlier game, that is."

Another one of the most unique features of *Slime World* is the way the environments are designed, especially for their use of carefully moderated levels of danger (although it does have more than its share of unfair traps that require trial and error to avoid). This means that players typically sustain an ordinary amount of damage from many enemy sources in the form of being slimed, which slowly adds up over time and eventually kills the player if they don't take any precautions. Luckily, there are limited-use invulnerability shields that can be picked up, as well as pools of water that remove all your damage by washing off the annoying slime. But then there are also the red enemies that, when shot, cause an explosion of



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Atari Corporation
- » **DEVELOPER:** Epyx
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **GENRE:** Adventure
- » **PLATFORM:** Lynx



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MUSIC MACHINE
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1983

CALIFORNIA GAMES
SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1987

GATES OF ZENDOCON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ATARI LYNX
YEAR: 1989

ESSENTIAL PICK-UPS



ENEMY BAIT

■ This handy trap draws enemies into a room and kills them instantly, but it only works on standard foes, unfortunately.



SLIME GEM

■ This is the most common pick-up of all in *Slime World* but it's still useful as it rewards you with both bonus points and health.



JET PACK

■ While this power-up lets you fly, it also takes away the ability to shoot. You must also be careful what you bump into.



TRIPLE SHOT

■ Definitely one of the more useful pick-ups at your disposal, the Triple Shot greatly increases your rather meagre firepower.



MEGA BOMB

■ Does exactly what it says on the tin. Walk into a crowded room, drop the bomb and get out of the way before it explodes!



CLEANSER

■ Another very useful pick-up to look out for, the Cleanser can be used to turn pools of slime into health-restoring water.



SHIELD

■ Another fairly self-explanatory item, the Shield will protect you from standard monsters for a limited amount of time.



RED GEM

■ This rare gem not only awards you with a bonus, but also full health and limited invincibility. Be careful not to shoot it though!

red slime that can instantly kill you, even if you have a shield, creating situations when it's actually better to avoid enemies rather than destroy them. The levels of danger are also moderated by the different game modes, of which there are an impressive seven in total, all offering a different gameplay experience. These level variations go as follows: Easy – great for learning the game's fundamentals with very few serious dangers to bother you; Exploration – a much larger map and more enemies; Action – heavy concentration on alien blasting, Logic – where your gun is disabled and you must use your brains to win; Suspense – the level must be completed within a time limit, Combat – an ultra-competitive multiplayer mode; and, lastly, Arcade – the greatest challenge of them all as there are no checkpoints and the ferocity of enemies is increased. Not only does this present a number of different ways to play the game, to suit different tastes, but also helps provide an excellent level of challenge. Peter explains his thinking behind this, "I wanted to give the players the most value that I possibly could, and adding lots of different modes gives a lot of value for not too much development cost. It also presents the opportunity for different types of players to enjoy the game." It should also be mentioned that *Slime World* has a very unique, for the time, auto-mapping system that came long before the one in the highly-acclaimed *Super Metroid*.



» [Lynx] You're going to die quickly if you laze around in this pool of slime. Get out quickly before you turn an ugly shade of green.

> "I was the only producer at Epyx, so, I was assigned to the Slime World port"
>
> Matt Householder

This also helps the player discover secret areas by dropping subtle hints.

These secret areas ended up being quite a big part of the game, and Peter even implemented an extra special one that would lead to a reward from Epyx itself, as he gleefully reveals. "At the end of the Arcade level, start squirting around to open up another level. This is a very hard level, which in turn opens up increasingly hard levels to just stupidly hard levels. The final one of these explains how to tell Epyx about your accomplishment (bit late for this now, though). One of the levels has a bad pun spelled out in the slime: [one] is one gross, [the other] is two gross – too gross! There was at least one person who made it all the way to the end and contacted us, we really didn't expect that!" But this was not the only secret that Peter had included in *Slime World*. As was common with many of Epyx Lynx releases, there was also a hidden minigame, too, (*Conway's Game Of Life* in *Zarlor Mercenary*, *Breakout* and *Asteroids* in *Electrocop*, *Mandelbrot* in *Chip's Challenge* etc.) that takes the form of a spot-squeezing challenge! "The zit-popping minigame can be played by going to the summary screens and then going to the part where Todd is pictured green," Peter reveals. From here, press option one and you'll see a zit appear. Then you can blow it up by hitting the buttons as fast as you can! This also works in multiplayer mode where it becomes a competition against your opponent."

Like Epyx's other Lynx releases *Slime World* is also very strong on a technical level with some very

COMLYNX PARTY

While no Lynx titles beat Slime World's eight players, Comlynx still had great support



CHECKERED FLAG

■ Supporting up to six players at once, *Checkered Flag* is a firm favourite at retro gaming events across Europe and the United States. There is even a regularly-organised World Championship for the game! The addition of extra human competitors makes this already slick racing title all the more better.



WARBIRDS

■ When people talk about the best Comlynx games *Warbirds* is always one of the first titles to get a mention. This technically-impressive World War I dogfighter allows up to four pilots to jump into their cockpits and take to the skies to discover who's the most skilled gunner of them all.



» Some advertising material for the Japanese version of *Todd's Adventures In Slime World*.



» [Lynx] No one ever said spelunking in the slimy underground was going to be a walk in the park.

impressive graphics and animation, most notably in the form of the intro sequences which appear before each level. Peter remembers how these came around, "I came up with the concept for them and did all the coding," he reveals. "But it was our artist – I'm sorry, I don't remember his name – who did all the art for the game and he did an excellent job!" Former Epyx producer Matt Householder informs us that the talented artist in question was actually Matt Crysdale who now works as the art director on EA's *NBA* and *NFL* games. As impressed as we were with the graphics in *Slime World* it was actually the audio in the game that Peter himself was most pleased with. "My biggest technical challenge was actually the music," he says. "Although the audio driver for the Lynx was well developed, it was huge for a 64k system. So I wrote my own music system that incorporated both music theory and rhythm tracks to create music on the fly. All of the music in *Slime World* is actually written on the fly by an AI system, all to save space. But I think it actually turned out well." Matt Householder, who also went on to produce the Mega Drive port, was in awe of this clever piece of coding: "Peter's audio design was absolutely groundbreaking. It was experimental, algorithmically code-driven and somewhat brutal. I clearly recall talking with LX Rudis, who converted the sound engine to the Sega Genesis, and Greg Omi (of *Lynx Klax* and *Electrocop* fame) about the pioneering electronic music composer Raymond Scott and his Electronium. They (Peter and LX) may have even been inspired by my interest in Scott, my memory can't confirm this though, so it may well be completely wrong!"

Speaking of Matt Householder and the Sega Mega Drive/Genesis port we were interested in the story behind this, and Matt was more than happy to offer up an explanation. "I was not involved directly in such business decisions, but I believe that Bill Lamphear (Epyx president) had been contacting all the newer Genesis and Nintendo licensees, especially those with offices in Northern California, to try and gain additional revenue from the original Lynx titles that Epyx had developed. *Slime World* was quickly licensed by Renovation, a new console publisher funded from Japan with an office in Los Gatos, CA. They picked up the publishing rights to Genesis/Mega Drive as well as the TurboGrafx-16/PC Engine consoles. As part of the deal, Epyx agreed to do the actual conversion to the Genesis and I was put in charge of making that happen. I had only just returned to Epyx after it had gone bankrupt following its Lynx misadventure with Atari. Being much smaller, it reminded me (positively) of when I'd first joined Epyx in 1985. I was the only producer at Epyx, so, naturally, I was assigned to the *Slime World* port! If I recall correctly, all of Epyx's staff programmers were busy on other projects, so I ▶



BATTLE WHEELS

■ After *Checkered Flag*, Beyond Games' *Battle Wheels* is the only other Lynx title to support up to six players simultaneously. We'd argue that this is the best Comlynx title of them all, though, as it throws all the players into three-dimensional arena to fight out to the death via any means necessary!



XENOPHOBE

■ The only arcade conversion on our list, the original *Xenophobe* coin-op supported up to three players at once but the Lynx translation goes one better. The best part of this is that one of the four can disguise themselves as an alien and cause all kinds of mischief for the other players!



CALIFORNIA GAMES

■ When you think of the Lynx, *California Games* is always one of the first titles you think of and this launch game follows on from the other versions by supporting up to four players. The big difference is that you can all play at once now and extra moves allow you to sabotage your opponent's efforts!

SURVIVING THE SLIME

Follow these top tips so you don't slip up in Slime World



WASH REGULARLY!

■ We know this is something your mum always told you, and it was pretty good advice! Pools of water are important in *Slime World* to wash that health-zapping green goo away and restore you to your former glory, so use them at every available opportunity.



SECRET ROOMS

■ It's a known fact that gamers love looking for secrets in games, and *Slime World* has plenty of them to find. These hidden areas often contain rare gems, power-ups and other useful items that will aid you in your escape from the horrible slime-ridden worlds.



BOMBS AWAY!

■ Mega Bombs are one of the most useful items that *Slime World* has to offer, so make sure you save them up for when you really need them. Some levels have rooms that are so chock full of foes that it's pretty much impossible to clear them without one.



SUICIDAL TENDENCIES

■ Although you are given infinite lives on most of the scenarios in *Slime World*, it's fairly important to remember that every time you die, you lose all of the items in your inventory. So yeah, those suicide missions aren't quite as clever as you may think!

MORE GOOEY GAMES!

Here's a selection of other titles to get down and dirty with…



BOOGERMAN

■ Subtitled '*A Pick And Flick Adventure*', this 1994 platformer by Interplay for the SNES and Mega Drive features 20 levels of disgusting action. If there ever was a game that encapsulates the word gross then it's this one! A sequel was pitched via Kickstarter in 2013, but it failed to meet its $375,000 funding goal.

SLIME

■ Programmed by the legendary Steve Hales, who would go on to work on games such as *Decent*, *Maniac Mansion* and *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Slime* was released for the Atari 8-bit computers in 1982 by Synapse Software. The idea of the game is to stop alien slime invading the earth with your shields.



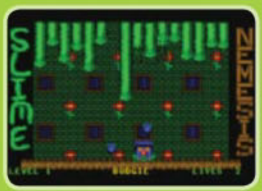


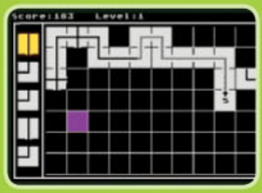
GILBERT: ESCAPE FROM DRILL

■ If you grew up in the UK in the late Eighties you will no doubt remember Gilbert – a slimy green alien from kids TV who grossed out parents everywhere. Alternative Software was quick to cash in on his success with this 1989 collection of minigames released across no less than six different formats.

SLIME NEMESIS

■ In this 1991 Atari ST-exclusive by Budgie UK you play the role of Rusty Jim (a take on Eighties TV game show star Dusty Bin) in an effort to stop a school being covered in slime. Shooting the dripping columns of slime causes them to retreat and you can collect the coins to purchase upgrades.





SLUDGE

■ Published for the Atari 8-bit in 1994 by New Breed Software, *Sludge* is nothing more than a shameless clone of the classic puzzle game *Pipe Mania*. Not that this is a bad thing, the addictive gameplay is as good as ever as you try to force the sludge through the pipes for as long as possible.

contacted Greg Omi, who had coded for Epyx as a contractor on a number of other game projects. Greg did the coding, Epyx artists did the new art (title screen, intro sequence, mini-map), LX Rudis did the audio (under contract), and I managed all the production and testing. Original designer Peter was still employed by Epyx, so we consulted him from time to time on the project. Renovation as publisher did the box, manual, advertising and all the promotion itself."

These home console ports actually differed from the Lynx version in several ways. Firstly, it understandably lacked the eight-player link-up system, offering up a split-screen two-player mode instead. Secondly, there were some more minor changes to the introductions and in-game visuals to fit the larger screen, most notably the map being moved from a separate screen into the top right hand corner. Lastly, the PC Engine version also featured a new soundtrack and full-length cartoon-style story driven intro, as the game was inexplicably chosen for a Super CD-ROM release. Matt explains why some of the changes were made, "We actually did our very best to support multiplayer but ending compromising with the two-players on a single TV split-screen mode. I do recall discussing the idea of linking consoles together somehow to support up to four players on two or even four screens. But the market for that would have been vanishingly small and we did not have either the time or budget to do it. The mini-map was novel, but was also done to cover some of the vast, blank green area (especially in the one-player mode) that the





» [PC Engine] The PC Engine port features a much richer colour palette than the Mega Drive conversion.



TAP THE MAP

■ The map featured in *Slime World* isn't just useful for looking where to go but it also provides you with many subtle hints and coded messages that can help you on your way. If something seems a bit out of the ordinary, then it's well worth investigating!



POACHED SNAPPER

■ By far one of the most irritating enemies in *Slime World* is the hidden snapper who jumps out of the floor to hand you a helping of your own death. But if you are very careful, you can look out for small signs that one is getting ready to pounce and avoid it.



SUPER HANG-ON

■ Learning to hang off the many ledges is another key skill you need to learn if you are to survive the slime. Once you get Todd in position, you can then move the screen around and shoot all of the bad guys in vicinity without putting yourself in danger.



SNAKE EYES

■ One of the biggest pests in *Slime World* are the huge snakes that inhabit entire caverns and take you out with one hit. At first, these slippery serpents seem indestructible, however a few shots in the face will seem them retreat just long enough for you to get past.

"There were several hundred attendees there who seemed to think we were just a bit odd"

Matt Householder



» [Mega Drive] There is much less variation in the visuals in the Mega Drive version compared to the other versions.

little Lynx screen did not show." As the original creator of the game, we had to ask Peter what he thought of these versions compared to his own. "I have to confess that I've never played them myself," he admits. "I think they follow the original pretty faithfully except for some of the back story. I was never consulted as much as I would have liked in their development." It has to be said that while both versions are more than playable they definitely lack the polish of the original Lynx game.

We have always got the impression that in the early days of the Lynx, the Epyx team really lived the dream and had great time doing so, there always seems to be some great stories about those days and the development of *Slime World* is no exception. With so many rolling off their tongues we just had to share a few of them with you and this tale from Peter is one of our favourites: "The Loma Prieta earthquake happened during *Slime World*'s development and Epyx was at the other end of the bay bridge that collapsed. I ran out of the building and hung on a lamp post before the end of the quake hit. The interior of Epyx was absolutely trashed! My office had cracks in the wall where the drywall had flexed and in the office next to me a large bookcase had crushed the desk. Fortunately nobody was hurt but during the clean-up we found mounds of techno trash including game systems, controllers, floppy disks etc. that were thrown into huge dumpsters as they were totally ruined." Matt's own *Slime World* story was definitely our favourite. "In late 1991/early 1992 as a kind of promotional stunt, I took the original Lynx version of *Slime World* to the first Cyberfest promoted by *Mondo 2000* magazine in San Francisco. It was an all-night proto-rave of technology and entertainment. Four of us from Epyx attended – the others were Gil Colgate, Tom Schumacher and somebody I can't remember. We had four Lynxes linked together and a backpack full of AA batteries that we changed every three hours or so. The four of us walked around linked together all night (from about 11pm to 7am) in a huge warehouse divided into a warren of rooms and hallways, just playing *Slime World*. We inhabited their Cyberfest as a little wandering island of our own virtual world. There were several hundred attendees there, including psychedelic drugs expert Timothy Leary, who seemed to think we were just a bit odd! By dawn we were all pretty [tired] and I recall getting into my car and going home to sleep all day."

With *Slime World* being so fondly remembered by many we were interested to find out if Peter had ever considered making a sequel, "I produced a preliminary demo, mostly just a technical proof of concept, from a project I did about a year ago. It is no longer active because of licensing issues, but maybe I will come back to it. I now have my own little business FuddyDuddyGames.com that keeps me pretty busy." For Matt, the legacy of *Slime World* is a little bit different "Phil Vaughan, an Epyx artist, drew the *Slime World* maggots on plastic microwave plates used at the Epyx 1991 summer picnic. I kept them for years afterward and used them occasionally at parties at my home ever since!" While the Game Boy had *Metroid II*, the Lynx had *Slime World* and while it's not as well known it was far more innovative, and arguably just as worthy of its place in the history of arcade adventures. It's only right to leave the last word with the creator, so take it away Peter: "*Slime World* is without doubt one of my fondest memories. I still have the *Game Players* magazine Atari Lynx Game Of The Year award displayed on my wall and it's nice to know that people still care about it after all this time." ✱

Special thanks to Peter Engelbrite and Matt Householder.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

» **Featured System:** PC
» **Year:** 2009
» **Developer:** Eidos/Warner Bros.
» **Key People:** Stefon Hill – Director; Paul Dini – Writer; Kevin Conroy, Mark Hamill and Arleen Sorkin – Actors

GO DEEPER

» **Batman's and the Joker's appearances were inspired by existing iterations, from *Batman* artists Jim Lee and Brian Bolland respectively.**

» **According to Ian Livingstone, there was one member of the dev team who worked on nothing but Batman's cape – *for two years.***





»[PC] As a visual flourish, Batman's suit takes permanent rips and tears throughout the game.

58. BATMAN ARKHAM ASYLUM

Rocksteady's blockbuster game set the standard for adapting superheroes from comic books to controllers. Drew Sleep activates Detective Mode to show you why

THE BACKGROUND

In the early-to-mid Noughties, superheroes were existing under the dustsheets in the world of videogames, despite beginning to enjoy success on the silver screen. They were enjoying a fraction of a spotlight with *Marvel Vs Capcom*, sure, but there was no real definitive title that let cowls, capes or spandex take the centre stage.

Spotting this gap, Eidos obtained the rights to a *Batman* title in spring 2007, and, with its publishing partner Warner Bros., placed its trust in a little-known studio called Rocksteady – a studio with only the lukewarm *Urban Chaos: Riot Response* to its name. The company had made a compelling prototype for Eidos, and was set to work on the Batman title by September of that year.

Rocksteady brought *Batman* comic book and *Animated Series* alumni into the fold in order to create a game that set itself apart from the film series that was ongoing at the time, opting for twisted visuals and outlandish enemies that would fit better under the guise of a videogame.

As the release period of August 2009 drew near, Eidos president Ian Livingstone placed himself as the chief engineer of the hype train. He openly told the gaming press at the time that Eidos was expecting *Arkham Asylum* to score "over 90", he was confident that the team had made something fantastic – and like some sort of opposite reincarnation of Nostradamus, he couldn't have been more on the money.

THE GAME

Contrary to the zeitgeist, *Arkham Asylum* isn't entirely original, it instead cherry-picks tropes and systems from other games and weaves them together. Its iconic opening, where you enter the asylum, riffs on *Half-Life*'s opening tour through Black Mesa; its item-gated structure, where you have to obtain power-ups to unlock areas, is ripped straight from *Metroid*; and its story and characters… well, they need no introduction.



»[PC] What better villain to kickstart a *Batman* gaming series than the dastardly criminal clown himself?

"Asylum is a piece of the Batman franchise that has been constructed with loving care"

That's not to say *Asylum* doesn't have a patent to its name, however. Its Freeflow combat system is one of the best, and beautifully elegant, combat systems to ever grace a controller. In this system you must correctly time hits, stuns, counters and evades (each action mapped to a face button on your controller), and, as you encounter strong enemies, you must remember their strengths and exploit their weaknesses – some enemies may require stunning before hitting them, for example. The resulting combat is so tightly made it became the standard for the series and has been 'borrowed' by many other games to this day.

What makes *Arkham Asylum* so good, and important, though, is how perfectly it puts you into the shoes, cape and cowl of the Batman himself. Every aspect of Batman is covered: stealth sections using fear against your enemies? Done. Fighting hordes of enemies in a seemingly-effortless fashion? Got it. Memorable encounters with some of the most dastardly villains ever conceived? Sorted. *Arkham Asylum* is a piece of the Batman franchise that has been constructed with a loving care for its source material, making it stand shoulder-to-shoulder with other great works from the series, such as *The Killing Joke* and *The Dark Knight*.

Sitting down and starting the game is like the beginning of an addiction. After the introduction sequence, and subsequent scuffle as Joker assumes control of the asylum, you'll want to unearth every secret Arkham has to offer, unravel every riddle that the Riddler has left for you in a challenge of wits, and, of course, stop the Prince Of Crime dead in his tracks.

There are bugbears along the way, of course, as the enemies become stronger you require a lengthy list of specific instructions on how to vanquish each enemy you encounter; the game's infamous Killer Croc encounter is also a bone of contention with many who play the game, causing frustration as you are forced to *walk* through the sewer area to avoid becoming a main course. The game also suffers from a common videogame problem: not being able to deliver on the climax it builds up to. Without giving much away: the final boss encounter is nothing short of a joke. Normally, these blips could blemish a game into mediocrity however the rest of *Asylum* is so polished that they can be excused. Rocksteady did take notes, however, and fixed a lot of *Asylum*'s issues for its sequel, *Arkham City*.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

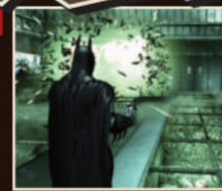
Arkham Asylum not only set the bar for superhero games, it set the bar for action-adventure games for years to follow, and its influence is still being felt today. Its easy-to-pick-up, difficult-to-master combat can be seen, ripped wholesale, in modern releases from *Mad Max* to *Shadow Of Mordor*. *Asylum*'s sequels, *City*, *Knight*, and, to a lesser extent, *Origins* have all enjoyed critical and commercial success, however they didn't stay too far from the original game's Metroidvania-like template, and with good reason: it works, and the people clearly enjoy it. It's frequently debated if *Arkham Asylum* or *Arkham City* is the better game of the series, however without *Asylum*, the franchise will have never existed, which is grounds enough for us to crown it as the jewel of the series, thus cementing its rightful position in the gaming annals as a rock-solid classic. *



»[PC] A vain Batman here, favouring striking a stupid pose, rather than clobbering an attacking mutant criminal.

Things of note

METROID-WHAT!?
The game uses a Metroidvania template where certain areas of the overworld are inaccessible until you obtained a power-up to traverse the area.



BIFF! POW! SMASH!
The game's combat system requires you to time hits, counters and stuns in a incredibly simple, yet nuanced approach to combat that has been mimicked frequently



BAT-SHIT CRAZY
The Scarecrow scenes are fantastic. His toxin sends Bats into a nightmare drug trip, with the bag-headed villan himself showing up with an entourage of skeletons.



AUTHENTICITY
The team wanted to make its game faithful, so veteran Batman writer Paul Dini was brought on board and long-time *Batman Animated Series* voice actors were hired.



BECOMING THE BAT
Above all, *Arkham Asylum* nailed what it feels like to be Batman. The characters, story, gadgets, combat and detective work puts you, the gamer, in his iconic suit.





»[PC] Scarecrow's Fear Toxin set-pieces were utilised as a great excuse for the team to flex their creative muscles.



»[PC] Kevin Conroy's then-17-year experience of voicing Batman certainly shows in his fantastic performance.

The History of
Discw

Gregg Barnett and Chris Bateman reveal to Paul Walker-Emig how they turned Terry Patchett's universe into a trilogy of essential adventure games

Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* is a remarkably flexible fictional creation, able to incorporate and parody all manner of aspects of our world and culture: Hollywood, journalism, Shakespeare, commerce, rock music, religion, Lovecraft, politics, and a whole lot more have been fodder for its fiction. That breadth perhaps accounts for how the videogame trilogy based on it was able to change so wildly, the first two games being exemplary of the Nineties era of 2D point-and-clicks, presenting us with irreverent and colourful worlds packed with jokes, puns, and bizarre object puzzle, the last game a dark and atmospheric procedural detective tale that jettisoned the silliness and slapstick (though not the humour altogether) in favour of a more complex story and characters, gesturing to what adventure games would later become in the revival sparked by games like Telltale's *The Walking Dead*. The adventure genre is evidently equally flexible, able to bend to accommodate different approaches and deliver different kinds of experience, making it ideal for interpreting Terry's ever-evolving creation. That's not all what made the two such a perfect match. Free from the pressures that other kinds of games subject us to, adventure games give us space to breathe and experience rich worlds like no other genre can, whether that space be used to revel in silly dialogue, as in *Discworld* and *Discworld II*, or ponder the plots and unravel the lies of devious characters, as in *Discworld Noir*.



» [PC] The original *Discworld*'s colourful pixel art world was full of slapstick and silliness.

Despite adventure games and *Discworld* being a perfect match for each other, the marriage of the two was far from an inevitability. Terry Pratchett cared about *Discworld* and wasn't prepared to risk it falling atop the ever-growing pile of licensed videogame trash just because a publisher might be prepared to throw some money at him. "I didn't know at the time, but quite a few publishers had approached him with big cheques," Gregg Barnett, cofounder of Perfect Entertainment and creative director on the first two *Discworld* games, tells us, "and he was never really interested in a big cheque. He wanted someone that respected and understood the IP." So, when Gregg decided that he wanted *Discworld* to be the game to launch the newly-formed Perfect Entertainment, his task was not to show Terry the money, but to show him that he cared.

In early conversations with Terry, Gregg offered to go away and design the game first before any deal had been signed. "We designed *Discworld* basically from start to finish exactly as it was," Gregg says. "Being an adventure game, you can script it out. You don't need to take metrics, or analytics, or do any testing. There will be issues, but in terms of story, plot, and puzzles, you can work it all out up front, which I did, and submitted it to Terry and he said yeah."

WORLD



» [PC] Terry Pratchett let Perfect develop a *Discworld* game because the developer demonstrated a clear understanding and affection for his work.



» [PC] The luggage introduced in Terry Pratchett's first novel follows you around in *Discworld* and *Discworld II*, serving as a walking storage box.

A number of things in the original documentation were cut from the game, including an RPG element, scripted bloopers, and Rincewind having a stunt double. Gregg later discovered that these were some of the things that had initially appealed to Terry, but, ultimately, those particulars weren't important. "Fundamentally, the main reason [that he signed] was that we did a design which showed we were willing to put in the work without any initial reward and that we understood and respected the property." That respect for *Discworld*, says Gregg, "was the big thing".

Gregg reveals that he originally approached Sierra On-line, a company with a strong history in adventure gaming, courtesy of the likes of *King's Quest*, to publish *Discworld*. "I went over and spoke to Ken and Roberta [Williams, the founders of Sierra] at wherever they [were] in California in the mountains," he recalls. "We signed up with them to get their engine and we worked on it for about three months". But then, just as Sierra were getting ready to send some people over to the UK to work with Perfect on the game, it all came to a halt. "They'd just created their online world, you wouldn't call it an MMO, but it was an online ▶







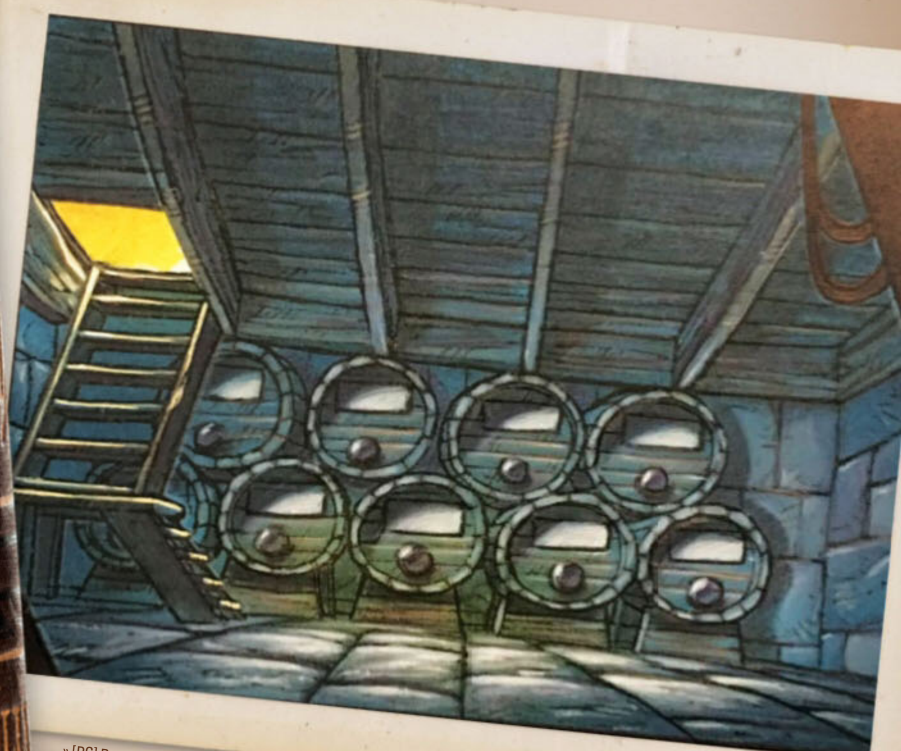
» [PC] As is the case in the novels, trouble just seems to follow poor old Rincewind.

▶ world. It was costing them a fortune," explains Gregg. "They had a big barn it was running in and it was eating all their funds." Sierra closed down all external development, including *Discworld*.

Fortunately, an advert placed by Perfect in *Computer Trade Weekly* seeking publishers garnered plenty of interest. Gregg tells us that EA were among the interested parties – the company ended up coming back with contracts months later when it was far too late – but it was Psygnosis which won out, thanks to some remarkable tenacity. "Psygnosis came in and wouldn't leave until we did a deal," Gregg says. "After we signed they said they'd offered Terry a big cheque but he'd said no. So they got the game without going through him; they went through us."

With a publisher back on board, Perfect went ahead and built an engine that would ultimately be used for all three *Discworld* games, taking the unusual step at the time of having the engine team in a separate location to keep the code clean, he also commissioned a writer whose dialogue was tweaked by Terry himself, and employed freelancers to create art for the game.

"Game one was a little bit Disneyesque," Gregg says, reflecting on the art style of the original *Discworld*. "The character design was based



» [PC] Backdrops were hand-drawn and effortlessly evoked the book's imagery.

FROM BOOK TO GAME

The novels that inspired the videogames



PYRAMIDS

1989

■ Before the third *Discworld*'s noir theme was settled on, a concept, starring Prince Teppic from seventh *Discworld* novel *Pyramids*, was worked up by lead designer Chris Bateman.



GUARDS! GUARDS!

1989

■ This novel about a mysterious brotherhood summoning a dragon as part of a plot to take control of Ankh-Morpork was the primary inspiration for the first *Discworld* game's story.



MOVING PICTURES

1990

■ The location of Holy Wood in *Discworld II* and its cinema story elements are borrowed from Pratchett's own parody of Hollywood and the film industry.



REAPER MAN

1991

■ The main plot point in *Discworld II* centred on Death's disappearance and subsequent problems with souls leaving the world, an idea that is taken from *Reaper Man*.

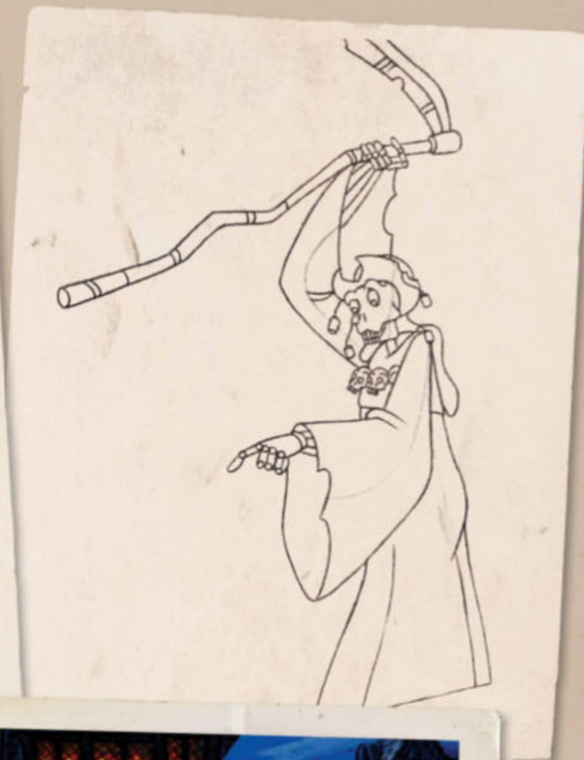


SMALL GODS

1992

■ *Discworld Noir* is an original story, but it still draws from the world established in the books, tapping into the mythology that was established in *Small Gods*, for example.







» [PC] One of *Discworld*'s most popular characters, Death appears in all three *Discworld* games.

"We used Hanna-Barbera, so the style became more like their style, a little bit broader, and also to suit the animation"
Gregg Barnett

on me giving a character designer my interpretation of characters. We used a character designer who had worked for Disney and went a bit slapstick on it. Game two we used Hanna-Barbera in the Philippines, so the style became more like their style, a little bit broader, and also to suit the animation," Gregg continues. "Even though we reinvented the art [for *Discworld II*], we did it with a studio that had 600 people there, at least. They had 50-odd people working on it, so in three months everything was done start to finish on the art." That, Gregg says, in combination with an engine created completely separately from the game script, helped to account for the quick turnaround for *Discworld II*, which was released the year following the first game.

Though the change to a lush cartoon aesthetic was significant, both games championed the same lighthearted tone. *Discworld* and *Discworld II* were games focused on fun – walking around to talk to the plethora of characters, pulled from the novels, and find out what they had to say often wouldn't deliver plot points, or hints about what objects you had to combine to solve a puzzle, but jokes. In that sense, the two games were very similar, functioning as vehicles for comedy as much as they were for puzzles. Gregg describes the games' humour as being a mix of Terry's own style and that of Monty Python (indeed, Python fans will spot plenty of references to the comedy troupe's most famous moments throughout the course of the first two games). He was keen to enhance that British feel of the games' comedy by hiring a talented voice cast packed with British talent.

We contacted John Cleese to do Rincewind," Gregg remembers, "and literally, he said, 'F**k off, I don't do games.' Terry wanted Nicholas Lyndhurst because physically he was based on him in *Only Fools And Horses*, but I'd based the character initially on a sort of angry John Cleese-style character. Eric Idle was second choice," Gregg continues, explaining that he tweaked the character to make it more like Eric's cockney character from Monty Python, "the one on the crucifix singing *Always Look On The Bright Side of Life*."

Alongside Eric Idle, there were other comedy notables including Tony Robinson, who played Baldrick in *Blackadder*, *Spitting Image*'s Kate Robbins, Rob Brydon, Nigel Planer from *The Young Ones*, *Red Dwarf*'s Robert Llewellyn, and even a former *Doctor Who* star in Jon Pertwee. Gregg reveals that there were a couple of notable 'almosts' too. He came close to getting Spike Milligan for *Discworld II* and tried to get Christopher Lee to play Death, but wasn't able to afford him. "He came back a couple of months later and said he would do it, but we'd already recorded Rob Brydon then," Gregg recalls.

Nevertheless, the cast Gregg gathered accounts for a large part of the charm *Discworld* and *Discworld II* possess in particular, making them as much of a pleasure for fans of British comedy as they were for fans of Terry's novels, as well as being key in tying the game's British comedy TV influences to Terry's world and characters. It's one of the many elements Gregg is happy with reflecting on the games, but he also recognises their weaknesses.

"There wasn't enough supporting," Gregg says in reference to the first game's difficulty. "If you tried something, it would come ▶

MEET THE VOICE CAST

Alongside Eric Idle, who voiced Rincewind, the games had a fantastic cast that brought Discworld characters to life





ROB BRYDON

■ Lewton, Death, Archchancellor Mustrum Ridcully **(pictured)**, Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler (*Discworld II*)





KATE ROBBINS

■ Carlotta Von Uberwald, Isla Varberg, Granny Weatherwax, Milkmaid **(pictured)**





TONY ROBINSON

■ Nobby Nobbs, The Dean, Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler (*Discworld*), The Cook **(pictured)**





NIGEL PLANER

■ Foul Ole Ron **(pictured, left)**, Mad Drongo, Count Henning Von Uberwald, Warb



» [PC] The conversation system used in the first *Discworld* was pretty much unchanged in the sequel.

▶ down to Eric Idle saying, 'That doesn't work,' a lot of the time, which was a very frustrating thing." Gregg suggested that people who followed the plot tended to have less trouble, but still thinks he could have done more. "I didn't put enough structure around it to propel people along certain paths. A lot of people would wonder around in an act everywhere they could get access to and pick up every possible thing without thinking too much about it and then you come to a puzzle and have way too much stuff in your inventory.

The other design mistake," Gregg continues, "was that there was a lot of retreading through areas you've already been through. Now, a game [like that] was *Dark Souls*, but what I like about that game was that you open up shortcuts eventually. I wish I had done something like that in *Discworld* where once you go through a whole heap of stuff once, you can open up a convenient shortcut."

Gregg feels that some improvements were made with the second game – there was far less traipsing around, for example – but also notes that, fundamentally, it was a very similar experience, based as they were on the same dialogue and puzzle solving mechanics. "It was more polished, but to a certain extent it was the same sort of system. The first game was rushed at the end, so had quite a few bugs. That was the publisher's decision," Gregg explains. "They had deadlines and they were happier to release and then patch rather than hold back a day. The second one was more solid in those terms.

> "The great thing about the way Terry's world works is that it's reflective of our world and of our media space"
>
> Chris Bateman

"We obviously learned 'that doesn't work' has to have more varieties," Gregg reflects, "but it just becomes more variety instead of hints. It wouldn't have Eric telling them the same line every time, but it effectively came down to him saying, 'You're doing it wrong,'" he says. "We did some good stuff, but it was just an iteration".

Changes were afoot when it came to the next game in the series. Psygnosis had been bought by Sony, with GT Interactive stepping into the fold as Perfect's new publisher, and plans for the third *Discworld* game meant that this next project represented far more than the iteration we saw between *Discworld* and *Discworld II*.

Why such a radical shift? For one, Terry had lost interest in comedy protagonist Rincewind as a character and didn't want to do a third game in the same style. At the same time, Gregg floated the idea of doing a totally original story, as opposed to basing it on the books, suggesting a film noir theme. Terry agreed. That resulted in a darker atmosphere, the dropping of the slapstick, and pushed the game towards having a more in-depth story and characters, closer reflecting what you'd find in Terry's novels.

"Once it was established that we would be doing this film noir pastiche, that added to my absorbing of Terry's writings reading Raymond Chandler novels and watching a whole bunch of classic Humphrey Bogart movies," *Discworld Noir*'s lead designer and script writer, Chris Bateman, recalls. "The great thing about the way Terry's world works is that it's reflective of our world and of our media space, so you can take anything from our world and you can project it into *Discworld* very successfully".





» [PC] *Discworld II* brought in a new visual style and cutscenes, favouring traditional animation and illustration over the pixel art from the original game.



Chris describes that process of trying to take the source materials that are outside of *Discworld* and work out how they would fit in as "playing at being Terry". Fortunately, he had a big helping hand in that Terry was still very much engaged in the project. "Terry took a copy of the script with him on holiday to Australia and edited the entire script himself while he was there," Chris tells us. "You would never normally get the person you were licensing material off to go through a script like that. He did such a fantastic job with it because he used a light touch; he didn't change anything that already worked. The one thing he did do is he rewrote every line that Death speaks in the game," Chris continues. "One of the reasons that happened I think is that I got scared about trying to write Death because it's such a core character in *Discworld* and I largely drew from lines that Terry had already written and just edited them into the script. I think Terry immediately knew that was what had happened and just rewrote all the lines".

Just as significant as the stylistic shift towards noir, reflected in the dark rain-soaked streets you had to prowl, moody dialogue, and a jazz-tinged soundtrack, was the move to 3D. Both Gregg and Chris suggest that this was the result of a generalised pressure to keep up with the times that pervaded the industry in the late Nineties. While Chris says that the transition over to 3D "was in no way smooth" from a production perspective, for the player, *Noir* actually made the switch with less trouble than many of its counterparts – even LucasArts' heralded *Grim Fandango* is notorious for its clunky controls – due to the fact that it didn't jettison its point-and-click control scheme. "Gregg and I were more or less in agreement that part of the appeal of the adventure game in terms of its ability to reach out to a slightly larger audience was that the point-and-click interface was readily understandable," Chris explains. "We made a ▶



» [PC] The production values for *Discworld II* were really kicked up a notch, resulting in lush cartoon art drawn by Hanna-Barbera studios.



» [PC] Naturally, the *Discworld* games had puzzles, however they were more tongue-in-cheek than most of their competitors.







» More backdrop art – if you dart your eyes to the right, you can see the finished product.

» [PC] The videogame version of Rincewind perhaps had a little bit more courage than the one from the novels!

commitment early on that we would preserve as much as possible of the point-and-click functionality. I do think it was the right decision for the game," he continues. "It's always a gamble when you start inventing a new interface that players have to learn".

What really made *Discworld Noir* shine, however, was not what it retained, but what it introduced: a notebook that would fill up with clues and suspects as the protagonist, a detective called Lewton, undertook his investigations. "It struck me that the best way of adapting film noir into the adventure game format was to make the puzzles build around the process of investigating and that was all about clues and how they organised themselves," Chris explains. "From that came this design of the notebook, which would collect together clues by cases or by themes and then, because the internet was just coming together, take advantage of the hyperlinking concept to enable you to switch between pages."

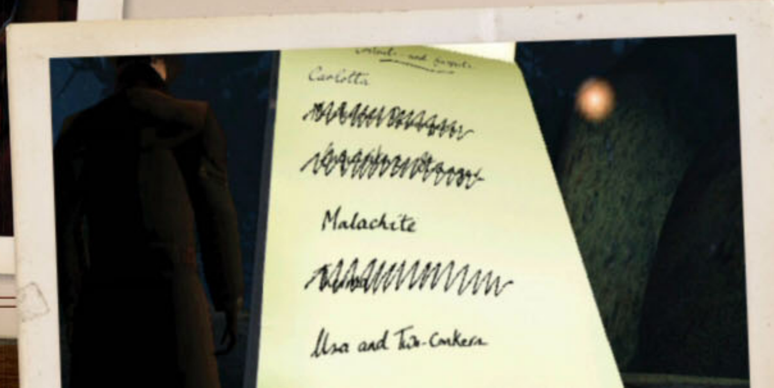
It turned out that shifting the game from being one where puzzles were about objects to one where they were about ideas, helped to provide a structure lacking in its predecessors. "Instead of having to do dialogue trees, or one of these other fairly artificial ways of organising conversation, organising the game's puzzles in terms of clues in the notebook meant that when you wanted to go and speak to people, the clues in the notebook become your conversation topics, which was a conceit that I thought was very different from the way conversation had been dealt with and very much in keeping with this idea of playing as a private investigator. Ordinarily," Chris continues, "puzzles are just things that interrupt you and prevent you from getting any further and are pretty much disconnected from the narrative." In *Noir,* however, the puzzles *are* the story, the clues being the medium through which the game's tale is told. In Chris' words, "the structure of the narrative as a whole and the flow of the clues went hand in hand".

Chris reveals to us that he is very happy with the design of *Discworld Noir* in general, but that he doesn't think it is without its problems. He struggled in some instances with getting the game's puzzles up to the degree of complexity that Gregg wanted and feels that he didn't always get that balance between narrative and puzzle complexity right. He's also not entirely pleased with another interesting idea, introduced via a radical narrative and mechanical shift that occurs midway through the story when Lewton gains the ability to transform into a werewolf and can use his powerful new nose to sniff out scents at crime scenes to help with investigations, different scents having unique colours that you can match with particular characters of objects.

"Even though, conceptually, the idea of showing the different scents as colours works very well when you are interrogating the different murder scenes with clues, it doesn't give the player any convenient way of navigating around the inventory, which is pretty badly organised as a result." Chris tells us that he floated the idea of giving each coloured scent icon a unique shape to better differentiate

» [PC] It's not noir until a bar or casino is involved, as Lewton has found out here.







» [PC] If you know your Hammett and Chandler, you'll know that you can't really trust the person who comes into a PI's office at the beginning of a story and hands them a case.

> "It struck me that the best way of adapting film noir into an adventure game was to make the puzzles build around the process of investigating"
> Chris Bateman

them, but that the team was struggling to get the game out the door, so had no time for the change. "It really was a case of what shortcut can we take to complete the content so we can ship this?," he says.

It may not have been perfect, but *Noir* had clever ideas that made it stand out from other adventure games, not least its brilliant use of a notebook that fitted perfectly with the detective theme and provided a solid backbone for the game's story. Unfortunately, it is rarely remembered for those great ideas, no doubt as a result of poor sales that reflected the failing fortunes of the adventure genre at the time.

It turned out that *Noir* would not only be the end of the *Discworld* series (as a gaming entity), but the end of the company that made it. Though the game didn't make back the money spent on its development, it wasn't that which killed Perfect, however. "Perfect was going to go public with Psygnosis and they were giving us quite a bit of work and future work, but then they sold to Sony instead," explains Gregg. "*WipEout*, *Destruction Derby* – we were the ones porting them from, usually PlayStation, to something else. Obviously, Sony didn't want that, and that's where the legal disputes started." Perfect's problems were compounded by the failure of the Sega Saturn. Porting work had been a key part of Perfect from the beginning, providing a steady flow of cash to keep the company in good health while it worked on original games. Between the dispute with Sony and the Saturn's failure, Perfect's porting work dried up, breaking the backbone of the company.

Gregg and Chris reveal that a game based on *The Far Side* comics and a licensed car chase game represent a couple of projects we could have seen from Perfect had they not closed, but we'll never know what they could have been. At least the studio leaves behind three fantastic adventure games as its legacy, games that represent the best of what the genre has, and continues to deliver: comedy, great characters, style, rich worlds, fantastic dialogue, brain teasers, and yes, even a few crazy object puzzles. *

THE FACE OF MANY VOICES

Kate Robbins had the daunting task of voicing every female character in the trilogy



How did you produce such a range of voices to play every female character in all three games?
I think I would have more trouble if I had to do it now because the timbre of your voice changes as you get older. 20 years ago I had more of a range and I could change the timbre of my voice more flexibly. I could do falsetto and deep, deep voices; it's just something I've been able to do since the age of five.

How did you find the voices of the characters?
I think we were shown drawings of the characters. As soon as I see an image, I just find a voice for it. Sometimes I'll think of an actress – say I see somebody who looks a little bit like Judy Dench – and it gives you a little bit of inspiration.

Do you remember much about the recording process?
I remember thinking, 'How am I going to get through this,' because the script was from the floor up to my waist! It was long sessions, but it was great fun doing them because I wasn't limited. I was free to be expressive, which is lovely. Lots of people don't do that these days. It was much more, 'Yeah! Go for it!'

Is there a big difference working on games and on other kinds of projects?
I'm more aware now that you are bringing something into someone's life that's going to be there for a long time, it's not so transient. I'm aware of the artistic responsibility, you could say. I try my best to make it really good and memorable. You like to think that kids and adults when [they're] playing these games are enjoying what you are doing.



In the chair with...

SUDA51

We sat down with one of gaming's most charismatic and controversial characters to discuss his fascinating career, from his humble beginnings working on wrestling games through to running his own studio, and all the interesting works that were produced throughout his journey

The punk rock maverick of the games industry, Goichi 'Suda51' Suda has been creating weird and wonderful works for over 20 years. His games are known for eschewing conventional narrative and genres, and he maintains a left-field attitude, even while working for a giant company in Gung-ho. In the West, Suda51 is probably best known for his recent games – from *Killer7*, *Lollipop Chainsaw* and *No More Heroes*, but you might be surprised to discover just where he started his career, and how a love of the pro wrestling has imbued an entire design philosophy in his works. What's for certain, though, is that Suda51 is one of gaming's most important voices that is still working today.

Goichi 'Suda51' Suda is in London, happily conducting interviews in the bowels of the heaving MCM Comic Con, chatting about his new game *Let It Die*, and the remaster of one of his oldest works, *The Silver Case*. We were given the opportunity to sit down with the man himself to discuss his illustrious career, his thoughts on game design and the importance of *The Silver Case* to his own journey through the games industry.

As you probably know, though, Mr 51 isn't the most conventional of chaps. Pick almost any one of his games, and you'll be able to point to multiple elements that either push boundaries, shun convention, or just downright piss people off. He's not afraid to upset his audience or his peers in pursuit of his vision. So, with this in mind, it shouldn't come as a huge surprise that his career before videogames was a little bit… unusual, shall we say.

"Before I worked in the videogame industry, I worked in the funeral industry," Suda51 laughs, when asked about being an undertaker. "I did it for about ten months and thought about making it a career. I actually went to three different places to apply for an actual position there, and for whatever reason that didn't happen. Right before that might have solidified into an actual career, I quickly switched to videogames."

All the better for it, we're sure you'll agree. Still, this immersion in a world of morbid sterility must have had an affect on his personality and, indeed, his process as a game developer. Suda51 began his development career at Human, a company most famous for the *Fire Pro Wrestling* series, a subject that Suda51 was familiar with.

Even so, few could have expected just where Suda51 took this revered series in such a short time. *Super Fire Pro Wrestling Special* – a fairly mechanical 2D wrestling game – features a story mode where the main character eventually takes his own life.



» [SNES] Professional wrestling was popular in Japan, which explains why wrestling games such as *Super Fire Pro Wrestling 3* sold so well.

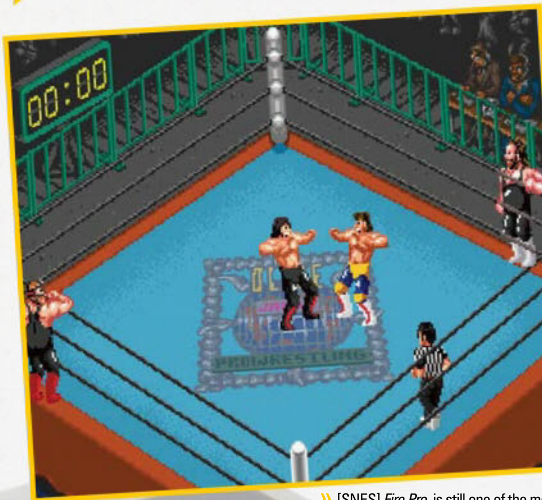
"To go back a little bit further, before we hit that game specifically, *Super Fire Pro Wrestling Special* was the game you were referring to, but I also made *Super Fire Pro Wrestling 3*, that was supposed to be the final game in the series, but it sold very well, so I had the opportunity to work on *Super Fire Pro Wrestling Special*, which also had a story mode," Suda51 begins. "As the game sold well, [Human] said, 'Make another one. This time, you can make it whatever you want.'

"I thought about what I could do to make this game unique, so I realised that the *Fire Pro* series itself was just a simulator, about raising a particular a wrestler and having him rise through the ranks. I thought, 'Well, what can I do within that? I know: I can make this a story, I can make this a story-driven experience.'

"Pro wrestling at the time was experiencing a boom in Japan – hence the games selling so well – so within that big boom, you have people getting very philosophical about wrestling and writing a bunch of things – analysis – and all these deep things. I'm personally a huge fan of wrestling, so I thought how



> "I'm a fan of wrestling, so how I can I give my take on wrestling? I saw games as a vehicle to do that"
> Suda 51



» [SNES] *Fire Pro* is still one of the most 'realistic' digital depictions of pro wrestling around.

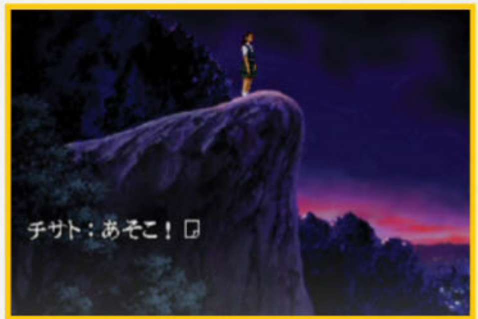


I could give my take on wrestling? What's my philosophy? I saw the game as a vehicle to do that.

"The final boss is a guy named Dick Slender, which is a parody of Ric Flair, and so originally I thought, 'We can have two endings here – one, you beat the guy and you get the happy ending, the other, you lose and get the bad ending. I didn't decide to go with the two endings – instead, you go on and beat the last boss, he gets all the acclaim from the crowd, from the people, and the screen gradually goes from white, to black. It shows the character's house, and he's committed suicide… For me, it was like an apotheosis – the character had become a god." Suda51 tells us, pointedly. "It turned into a shitstorm," he adds.

You can actually see a lot of Suda51's love of pro wrestling in his later games. Travis Touchdown, star of *No More Heroes* and its sequel unlocks all manner of suplexes, luchador masks and wrestling magazines as you progress. The 'sport' of wrestling is generally treated with more reverence in Japan than it is in the West; it's appreciated as a difficult and entertaining form of performance art – and as such its fans tend to be more thoughtful and even, as Suda51 says, philosophical about it than many might imagine.

Nevertheless, there is only so much digital wrestling a man with the ambition and creative spark of Suda51 can stomach, so it was not long before he moved onto the first project that would really go on to define the types of games he would be known for. Still at Human, Suda51 moved onto the unusual *Twilight Syndrome*, a weird combo of teen-girl, high-school drama and horror game, a game that is largely impenetrable for a western audience.



» [PlayStation] The design process of *Twilight Syndrome* threw Suda51 out of his comfort zone.



» [PlayStation] Due to the hefty volume of unlocalised text, *Twilight Syndrome* is largely impenetrable to an English-speaking audience.

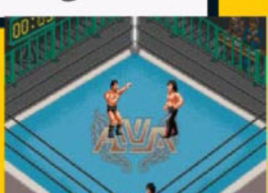
"The pro wrestling thing, I'd done that for two years," Suda51 tells us, "and I'd poured my heart and soul into making it, but that's a long time to be focused on just doing one thing, so I wanted to take a step back from that.

"Initially after *Fire Pro 3 Special* there was a plan to do a PlayStation game, and I participated in that, but the staff just wouldn't listen to me! So I said, 'Do you know what? I'm out.' Once I left *Fire Pro*, I had a bit of time, and *Twilight Syndrome* was actually an ongoing project at the time – it was early in production. The director of that game had some issues, he broke down into tears and said, 'I can't do this any more,' and I was called in by the boss and asked to take care of it. At first I was reluctant – taking over from someone else's work in the middle of production is a very difficult thing to do, so I didn't want to, but I figured, 'This is for the company, this is for all the people I'm working with… Okay, I'll give it a shot…'"

With two series now under his watch, Suda51 moved onto the sequel, *Moonlight Syndrome*, but, in truth, he's not the type of creator that is happy to sit in one



FIVE TO PLAY The essential Suda51 games to make you go crazy



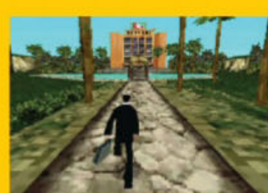
SUPER FIRE PRO WRESTLING SPECIAL 1994

■ Still revered as one of the best wrestling games, this simulation is now famous for its outlandish story mode. It's not every day the main character kills himself at the end, especially in a SNES-era game that's about a fake sport.



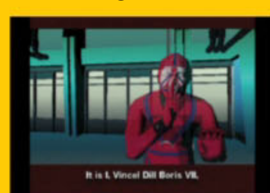
THE SILVER CASE 1999

■ A typically obtuse visual novel, Suda51's take on the police procedural drama has always been out of reach for us westerners, but with its recent remaster and localisation work, we a can all bask in its oddity. Hard work to get into, but rewarding all the same.



FLOWER SUN AND RAIN 2001

■ This is about as weird as it gets. Suda's unique spin on the adventure game features an endless loop of tasks, interaction with odd characters (whose voices are compressed and seemingly played backwards) and puzzle-solving. It's hard going, but it has its fans.



KILLER7 2005

■ A bizarre hybrid of on-rails-shooter, character action, political thriller and puzzle game, this is one of the most out-there major publisher releases ever from Capcom, and a classic example of Suda51 firing on all creative cylinders. It also has the best pre-boss music of all time.



SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED 2011

■ Technically not directed by Suda51 or Shinji Mikami, but is has their fingerprints all over it. In many ways, this is the *Resident Evil 4* sequel we all wanted – you just have to accept the weirdness, the smut and the relentless creativity to get to the crisp, satisfying action.

> "While working on these new projects, these kids were complaining about me"
> Suda51



» [PS2] *Killer7* is where most people learned of Suda51.

groove and churn out games in the same franchise. Like many ideas-driven people, his attention soon moved elsewhere, and after a period of time writing stories about high school girls, he was ready for another change.

So why does Suda51 like to get himself out of his comfort zone so quickly? "Rather than it being a conscious decision, my work process is that once I reach the end of a game cycle and we master up, that creates a bit of dead time at the end of a project, and that's when I usually start thinking about the next project," Suda51 muses. "I start thinking and planning and things like that. You don't know if the game you're working on is going to sell, so you need to be thinking about something else.

"I come from a planning background, so I see it as my job to come up with new ideas, new plans and to originate new things, and that's how we've moved onto new games and not just produced sequels."

As Suda51 spent time with the *Syndrome* games, though, the culture at Human changed and he went through a period of unrest. This was shortly before he left to form Grasshopper in 1998, so we were keen to find out why he decided to move. After all, in Japanese business culture, it's much rarer for employees to change companies than it is in the West.

"Thank you very much for researching that," he laughs, when prodded about the timings of his departure and subsequent founding of a new studio. Suda51 then looks around the room, and asks the various people if he should tell the real story of his somewhat acrimonious dissolution from Human. No one seems to object.

"After *Twilight Syndrome*, everyone left," he explains. "All the new people were graduates, and they were mouthy! I would go to the design department and they would be saying things, and at the time I felt like my boss didn't care for me. While working on this new project, these kids were complaining about me.

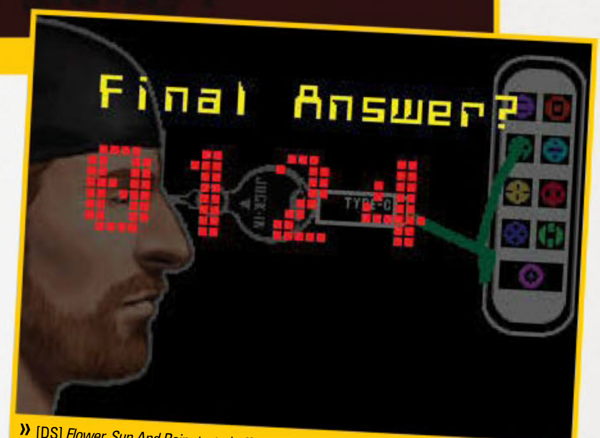
"And so within that, bonus season comes around. Most people get their cheques and they're doing pretty good … but mine is lower? Why? At the time I was the top guy in the development department, and then suddenly some new guy who is lower than me, he's getting promoted, so I thought, 'I can't handle this.'

After this bonus situation, people getting put above me and all this, I go to the boss and ask, 'What's going on here, what's the deal?' The boss says, 'Well, I'm getting complaints about you.' I thought that no matter what I say, I'm not going to change how these people feel.

"[At the time] I'd actually been talking to a company called ASCII. So I called them and said, 'Hey, I'm ready to go right now.' They said, rather than hire you, if you actually brought more people with you, you could actually create your own company. So I said okay, and that's how I went from Human to Grasshopper."

It's no real surprise that Suda51 has had personality clashes in his professional career – while he is charming and friendly, someone with his level of creativity and ingenuity typically won't fall in line with everyone. Onto *The Silver Case*, then, the game that is receiving the remaster treatment and a title that can be considered the first true, 'pure' Suda51 joint. If you've not played it, it's a weird (shocker), twisting take on the police procedural, told in the form of a visual novel. So why did Suda51 decide on that format for the debut from his new studio? "With the last two games I'd worked on, *Twilight Syndrome* and *Moonlight Syndrome*, they weren't my games, they were games that had been planned and created by the company I was working for, and I had the desire to create my own thing," he explains.

"After that, I really wanted to use my storytelling abilities. Also, when Grasshopper was made, it was about ten people initially, but the core team developing *Silver Case* was only five people, and so I have to do everything for everybody at first. As I'm writing this story, I realise this story can become a game design document – this story, this scenario, will become the game itself – I had a strong confidence in being able to do that. Because we were such a small team, that's what I decided to focus on."

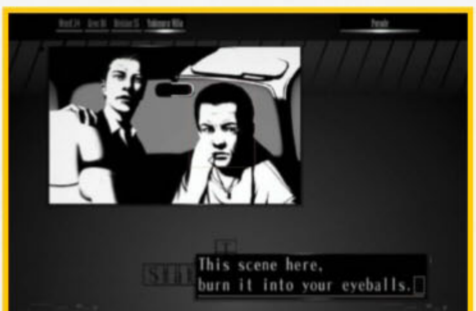


» [DS] *Flower, Sun And Rain* started off on PS2, before moving to Nintendo's portable.

It's always fascinating to find the inspiration behind a game as intriguing and creatively unusual as *The Silver Case* and Suda51 is happy to fill us in. "At the time when I was developing it, these crimes were happening in Japan, and these crimes were impacting everything around the media," Suda51 begins. "And because of that, even *Moonlight Syndrome* saw some changes as an impact of these crimes that were happening…

"So I began to think about, 'What is crime – what kind of impact does crime have on society?' It became something that was inside me, something that was difficult, so in order to have my own understanding and my own hypothesis about it, I decided I wanted to make a game that dealt with crime. I wanted to make something that specifically came from the point of view of a police detective. They see the crimes that are happening and their job is to analyse it – how do serial killers happen, why do crimes happen. These were the themes I decided to go with *The Silver Case*.

"One of the things about this game, at the beginning it asks you to put in your name. So the player themselves, they get put in the role of the person searching for the serial killer, and as the player progresses, they'll get



» [PC] It can be tough going to get into, but *The Silver Case* is well worth investigating for yourself.



SELECTED TIMELINE

GAMES

- **SUPER FIRE PRO WRESTLING 3 FINAL BOUT** [SNES] 1993
- **SUPER FIRE PRO WRESTLING SPECIAL** [SNES] 1994
- **TWILIGHT SYNDROME: SEARCH** [PSONE] 1996
- **TWILIGHT SYNDROME: INVESTIGATION** [PSONE] 1996
- **MOONLIGHT SYNDROME** [PSONE] 1997
- **THE SILVER CASE** [PSONE] 1999
- **FLOWER, SUN AND RAIN** [PS2] 2001
- **MICHIGAN: REPORT FROM HELL** [PS2] 2004
- **KILLER7** [GAMECUBE, PS2] 2005
- **NO MORE HEROES** [WII] 2007
- **SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED** [XBOX 360, PS3] 2011
- **SINE MORA** [VARIOUS] 2012
- **LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW** [VARIOUS] 2012
- **KILLER IS DEAD** [VARIOUS] 2013
- **LET IT DIE** [PS4] 2016

drawn in deeper and deeper and become more and more focused to get this killer, and by doing so they'll get drawn deeper and deeper into the game. Within that there's various images, there's movies, and, of course, the text I wrote is there as well. And I believe that players will get really invested in where the game's going next, what happens next."

"On top of that, there is another scenario where you follow the role of an investigative journalist called Morishima, and that person sees the events occurring from a step back – he's looking at it from outside, so what the player was experiencing before, as they were pursuing them as a police officer, now you get pulled a step back, and you experience it from a new angle. And then you're put back into the role of the police officer, and this pattern keeps repeating. It's like a drug – it will keep you wanting to go back and go deeper and deeper."

Suda51 explains how the remaster started, "Three years ago I met a company called AGM. They approached me and they had an appreciation of the title. They said, 'We can do this, leave it to us!' Seeing the enthusiasm, I thought I can entrust the project to them.



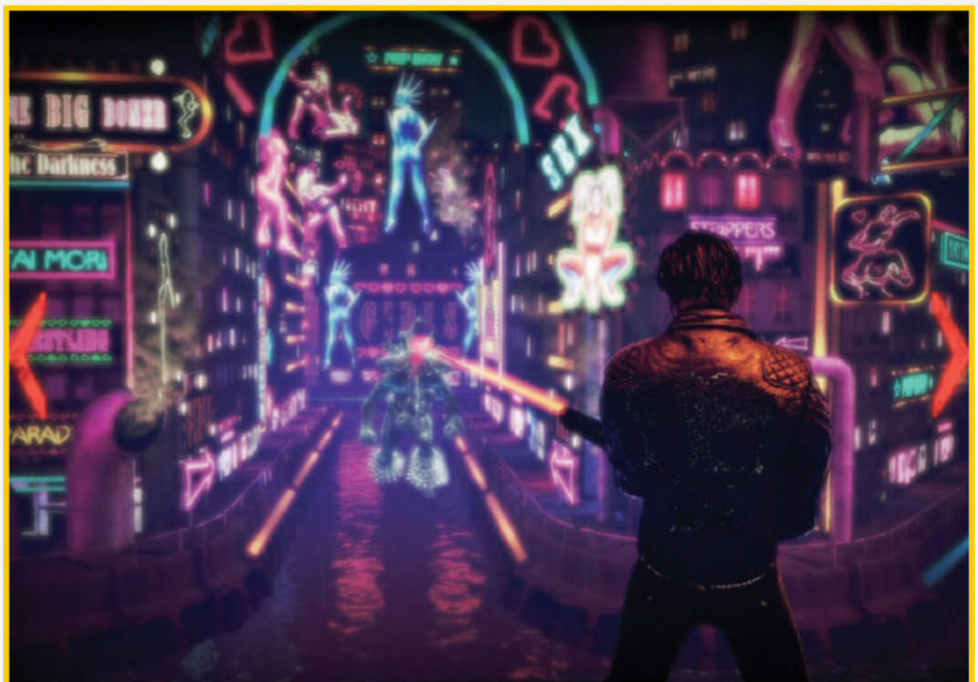
» [PS2] There are none more stylish than *Killer7*. Its freewheeling mechanics are even more notable today – a true enigma.

Also, women seem to be big fans of [Silver Case]," Suda51 continues. "This could be down to the controls – it's not an action game, it's a visual novel. Visual novels are undergoing somewhat of a renaissance at the moment. Even the young indie spirit exists in them. This game kind of has an indie spirit as well. Even though I wasn't thinking about these things two years ago when we decided to do it, it felt like exactly the right time."

As Suda51 and his team moved on beyond *The Silver Case*, a through-line began to appear in their work. Convention, genre and archetype were not hugely appealing to Grasshopper, and as such games like *Flower, Sun And Rain*, and *Michigan: Report From Hell* can be quite baffling to those coming in expecting a normal, conventional, game. Does Suda51, then, create gameplay around the needs of his stories?

"You're exactly right!" he exclaims "*Michigan* is a little different, but in the case of *Flower Sun And Rain*. The story definitely came first and we put the gameplay elements within it and let it grow from there."

The defiance of convention continues to this day, despite Suda51's rise in prominence and his work with some larger publishers and more mainstream audiences. Most of us in the West first heard his name when Capcom announced the bold and brave *Killer7* – a game



» [Xbox 360] Critics weren't hugely kind to *Shadows Of The Damned*. Yes, it's lewd and daft,but it's also varied, inventive and handles well.



» [Xbox 360] *Lollipop Chainsaw* was a collaboration between Suda51 and James Gunn, who would go on to direct *Guardians Of The Galaxy*.



> “From the beginning, Mikami-san told me that this is a game that will be released globally”
> Suda51

that truly stood out from the pack from the time the very first screenshot was released.

When creating *Killer7*, we were keen to find out how working on a game that was to get a global release (a first for Suda51) changed his mentality at all. “Good question,” Suda51 answers, “From the beginning, [Shinji] Mikami-san told me that this is a game that will be released globally, and that’s something that I was conscious of and thought about a lot when working on the game – for starters the game takes place in America. So I thought, what can I write about America? So that’s where the idea of having Japanese politicians come over.

“The game takes place around 70 years after the war, so what would happen if the peace treaties between America and Japan were revoked. Thinking very deeply about this and about the scenario, I was able to come up with these characters. It’s a game that has my own take on things, but at the same time it’s a game that was very carefully thought about and planned meticulously.”



» [PS4] *Let It Die* certainly isn’t going to be for everyone, but it’s free to play and is worth investigating if you own a PS4.

What a game it is. A bizarre blend of on-rails shooter, third-person action adventure and batshit puzzle game, it brought a new sensibility to proceedings and is one of gaming’s true touchstones – an entire visual style stems from its art. This clearly gave Suda51 the confidence to pursue the action genre, and most of his works since *Killer7* have involved some sort of brawling or gunplay. Most notable among his recent output are the two *No More Heroes* games, punk classics in every sense, and not just the Stranglers-referencing title.

Strangely, these games were released on Nintendo’s family-friendly Wii, somewhat alienating an older audience who had migrated onto Xbox 360 and PS3. What prompted the decision to develop exclusively for Wii? With hindsight, was Suda51 happy with this choice?

“To start at the end of the question, yes I’m glad I did it. One point, though, for Japanese people, they don’t necessarily think of Nintendo hardware as for kids. And so when the Wii was first announced I saw the Wiimote. The action that the character Travis has, this is perfect for that, this is the only thing I can use for that.”

Suda51’s point is appreciable but there’s little argument that both games would have been just as enjoyable without the ‘waggle’ factor. Regardless, with a 20-plus year career, you might forgive Suda51 for thinking about winding down, but he is still in the thick of it, full of ideas. Yet, that isn’t stopping him from feeling reflective – a new book is in the works, and *The Silver Case* is the first time he has revisited one of his works. What has prompted this period of reflection? “The company that approached me to do this, at first I was really confused because I still make games,” he laughs.



» Limited Run Games released a lovely limited edition of *The Silver Case*. It’s now sold out.

“So at this time, it was a time of great change in my life – the company had gone from being independent to being sold to Gung Ho, and also a German company approached me to make a documentary about me. This meant I returned to Nagano for the first time in a ages. So this was a great time of change for me, and it felt like, ‘Wow – this is the time to reflect and take it all in.’”

Of course, there couldn’t be a Suda51 interview without asking him an important question – just who is his favourite wrestler? After a period of consideration, Suda51 goes with a classic, “Bruiser Brody.”

It’s hard to argue with that. And one final question – which game should a new Suda51 fan jump in on if they want to experience the weird and wonderful madness that is ‘51’. Well, we should have guessed the answer, really…“*The Silver Case*! It’s the first game Grasshopper did, it’s where everything comes from, and there’s no better place to start, and it’s coming out very soon!”

He might be right, but if you fancy something a little more palatable, you can’t go wrong with any of Suda51’s titles, and there’s no better time to start your descent into his madness than now. ★

LIFE
MAGIC

SonSon II

MORE FUN THAN YOU CAN SHAKE AN OVERSIZED STICK AT

» RETROREVIVAL



» PC ENGINE » CAPCOM/NEC AVENUE » 1989

First printed in 1592, during the Ming Dynasty, *Journey To The West*, has been adapted countless times in the intervening years – from a popular TV series in the late Seventies, called *Monkey*, to Ninja Theory's *Enslaved: Odyssey To The West*, which arrived in 2010. Based on historical events, the revered novel recounts the epic pilgrimage of Xuanzang, a Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk who travels to the 'Western Regions' (essentially central Asia) in order to obtain precious sacred scrolls. Xuanzang is aided and abetted on his travels by three disciples: Sha Wujing, Zhu Wuneng, and the Monkey King Sun Wukong, who must all atone for their past sins.

Capcom has dabbled with adaptations of *Journey To The West* a couple of times, with its first foray, *SonSon*, appearing in arcades in 1984. Although it wasn't the greatest example of the scrolling platformer, it was popular enough to secure a far superior sequel, which arrived exclusively on the PC Engine in 1989. Buoyed by a lovely *Wonder Boy*-style vibe and with fantastic cartoon-like aesthetics, Capcom's sequel was an enchanting little game that refined and improved many of the mechanics found in its predecessor. There were a large number of useful items for SonSon to collect and use against his numerous foes, while a nifty experience system ensured that your magic and energy levels rose as you battled through its seven varied locations.

SonSon II's Japanese exclusivity meant that many missed out on this delightful game, but the accessibility of today's market means it's far easier to play now. Do yourself a favour and get hold of a copy today. *




1

RETRORATED



>> We kick off 2017 with a remaster of one of the best shooters available on the Super Nintendo. We also take a look at Super Mario Run to see if it lives up to all of the hype...



» [PS4] We love Bullet and Doris, they add a brand-new dynamic to the core gameplay and they are brilliantly designed, too.

Wild Guns Reloaded

NATSUME SHOOTS TO THRILL WITH ITS EXCELLENT REMASTER

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £24.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NATSUME INC
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

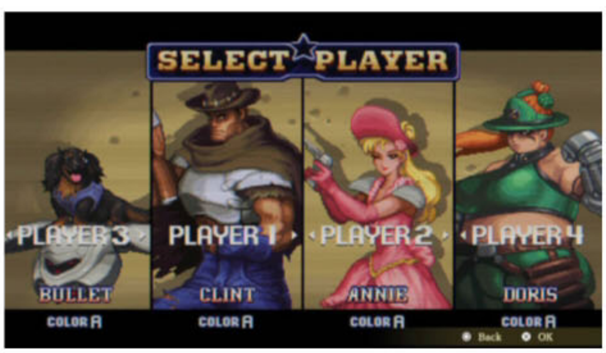


For many, remasters have become something of a dirty word in the games industry. Once upon a time, you had epic offerings like *Resident Evil* on GameCube, or *Metroid Zero Mission* on Game Boy Advance that took the original game and suitably enhanced it for a new hardware generation. Nowadays, most publishers seem content to throw out a lazy rehash that does little to suggest it's nothing more than a quick money grab. It's pleasing, then, to see Natsume has gone the extra mile to create the best remaster that we've played this past year.

For those that never played it, the original *Wild Guns* was first released in 1994 on the SNES and went on to become a cult classic. Effectively a variation of the classic coin-op *Cabal*, *Wild Guns* was unusual at its time of release due to its interesting setting, which fused the *Wild West* with steampunk and sci-fi. Its gameplay was otherwise identical to *Cabal*, meaning Annie and Clint could run and jump along the bottom of the screen to avoid bullets, but had to stay firmly planted in place when shooting enemies (control switched to an onscreen cursor, allowing access to all areas of the screen). A defensive roll was possible when engaging enemies, but otherwise the player had to rely on their wits and fast reactions to get them through each stage. Additionally, players could rapidly press the fire button to use a lasso, which would freeze or slowdown most enemies for a limited amount of time.

Wild Guns Reloaded is essentially the same game, but it has been enhanced in a number of significant ways that greatly improve the already fantastic and timeless gameplay. The most notable improvement is in the addition of two new characters: Bullet, a lovable Dachshund who is protected by a flying drone, and Doris, a hulking, grenade-lobbing cyborg. They play completely differently to Annie and Clint (who were largely identical in the original SNES game) and are clearly

» [PS4] The new character roster is excellent and makes a huge difference to the game in multiplayer mode.





BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Wild Guns* was released in 1994, exclusively for the Super Nintendo and was a small project with just five members working on it. Moulded on the likes of *Cabal*, *Blood Bros.* and *Dynamite Duke* it passed many gamers by, meaning it now fetches extraordinary prices on eBay. Thank goodness, then, that Natsume rereleased it for the Virtual Console in 2010.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

CABAL (ARCADE)



▼ SOMETHING NEW

SIN & PUNISHMENT: STAR SUCCESSOR (WII)



✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Wild Guns Reloaded

I regretted selling my cartridge of this. I have no such regrets now, *Reloaded* is so much better.



DREW

Wild Guns Reloaded

There's a dog *with a drone* shooting things up with his pals from the Wild West – Game Of The Forever.



» [PS4] While all the bosses take a lot of punishment, it just makes it more satisfying when they finally die.



» [PS4] One of the new worlds is filled with all manner of flying contraptions. It's rather hard as well.

aimed at more advanced players. Bullet is perhaps the hardest to learn, as unlike the other three characters, he can still run around whilst firing (which makes it surprisingly easy for him to run into stray bullets). Also, Bullet's drone targets a large area, systematically destroying everything that strays into its gunsights, but it is prone to getting hit (which temporarily stops it firing and puts Bullet at risk) It's also a little more awkward to place accurately compared to the crosshairs of the other characters. Doris, on the other hand, is effectively *Wild Guns*'s tank and she's devastatingly powerful when supporting the other players (although experienced gamers will do perfectly well on their own with her). As you'd expect, she's extremely slow-moving, which makes her very attractive to bullets, but her grenades can be powered up to a point where she can lob seven at once, decimating



» [PS4] Shadows obscure this new area, so use explosions to light your surroundings up.



» [PS4] Although one of the new levels is available on Normal mode, both feature on the hardest difficulty.

most things in their firing range. It takes an age to power them up, though, which presents a lovely risk-versus-reward mechanic, which keeps in theme with the core mechanics of the original game.

Another change to *Reloaded* is that multiplayer now caters for four players at once, although it's currently local multiplayer only, which is a missed opportunity, considering that online leaderboards are utilised. Even with the larger play areas, four-player games become insanely hectic, and it can be occasionally easy to lose track of where you are in the skirmish. It doesn't help that you have to physically dodge or jump past your friends, which can make things needlessly tricky at times. When *Wild Guns Reloaded* all comes together, it delivers some insanely satisfying action, particularly as the onscreen carnage is ramped up to take additional players into account, but it's not the game changer we were expecting it to be.

In addition to new characters and an expanded multiplayer mode, *Reloaded*, also adds two brand-new themed worlds, which comes with their own sets of challenges. One obscures your view with a fog-of-war type of affect, while the other has you dealing with gigantic flying ships. Both fit well into the theme of the original game, and are split between the normal and hard settings (the latter of which needs to be unlocked). Interestingly, we didn't notice the bonus round from the original game and there's no port of the Super Nintendo original either, which feels like a big oversight. It's not a deal-breaker, however.

Reloaded is everything we want from a modern remaster. It's been crafted with genuine love and attention and significant aesthetic enhancements (graphically it looks like a modern SNES game) it's challenging without being overly difficult and it adds plenty of new ideas and gameplay mechanics that improve the game. In fact, we'll go as far to say that this is the definitive version of *Wild Guns*, meaning you no longer have to spend £500+ in order to own a physical version of Natsume's superb shooter. *

In a nutshell

It's priced £5 too high and not including the original SNES version seems silly, but this is another brilliant remaster that deserves to find a brand new-audience.

>> Score **88%**

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we look at all the classics and latest releases that are available to buy or download

Shantae: Half-Genie Hero

» System: Vita (Tested), PS4, Xbox One, Wii U, PC
» Cost: £15.99 **» Buy it from:** PSN, Xbox Live, eShop, Steam

After 15 years as a cult favourite, Shantae deserves her time in the spotlight – and if there's any justice in the world, this latest game in the series should deliver that. It's been a while since we've played a 2D platformer that puts a smile on our faces as easily as the magical maiden's latest outing. Between expressive animations, upbeat tunes and a sense of humour that is noticeable without being overbearing, WayForward clearly knows what makes cartoon platform games so appealing.

The game itself concerns Shantae's attempts to help her uncle Mimic build a new invention which will keep Scuttle Town permanently safe. However, the pirate Risky Boots steals the blueprints and sets into motion an evil scheme. In order to help Mimic and thwart Risky, Shantae must visit a variety of platform stages and make it through each with her own body and a multitude of animal transformations. Stages are initially introduced as linear challenges with bosses at the end, but the people of Scuttle Town often need items from within each stage. This could have been an exercise in irritating backtracking, but repeat play is made enjoyable by taking place predominantly in new areas that can be reached by using Shantae's animal transformation abilities – for example, hovering as a bat or climbing as a monkey.

Shantae: Half-Genie Hero features plenty of variety, with sections including a frenzied climb up an abandoned tower, a madcap chase across an aerial armada and a testing factory with many moving production lines. Genre veterans might find the game a tad easy due to the abundance of health pick-ups you can collect (although hazards do arrive early and often), and a little more inventiveness wouldn't have gone amiss. Still, this is a highly-polished game and there's plenty of joy to be found in hunting down every last secret, so *Shantae* makes for an excellent budget purchase for any fan of 2D platformers.

>> Score **87%**

PICK OF THE MONTH



» [Vita] The mixture of 2D and 3D visuals is absolutely beautiful, thanks to great art direction and smooth animation.



» [Vita] Shantae's primary attack is a hair whip, but in animal forms she can stomp, bite and even spit acid.



» [Vita] This sliding stage is more than a little familiar for anyone who spent a lot of time with 16-bit platformers.



Wonder Boy Returns

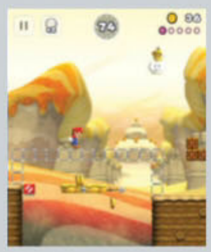
» System: PC
» Buy it for: £10.99 **» Buy it from:** Steam

This new *Wonder Boy* title is a HD remake of the original arcade game, which means linear platform stages with fruit to collect, skateboards to ride and snails to throw hammers at. The redrawn visuals are cute, though its mileage may vary – the style is reminiscent of mobile and browser games, which will be off-putting to some.

There are some small improvements to the original gameplay, too. The boss encounters are now much more varied than in the original game, featuring giant octopus attacks and more, and the game tracks your doll collection to encourage you to go back and find them all. However, few other improvements have been made so it's a relatively slight package for the price. If you're a big fan of the original, it's worth a look.

>> Score **62%**





Super Mario Run

» System: iOS **» Buy it for:** £7.99 (with free trial)
» Buy it from: App Store

Ignore the hounds who are baying over *Super Mario Run*'s price and the fact you always have to be online to play it, it's still one of the most fun platformers we've played on the platform.

Clearly inspired by the excellent *Rayman Jungle Run*, Nintendo's game messes around with the formula by adding puzzles in the form of pink coins that must be collected. Some of them are in seemingly inaccessible places, so ingenuity must be used to reach them. While there are only 28 levels they are exceptionally well designed, while the need to collect those coins adds longevity. Add in the excellent Toad Rally, which enables you to compete against other players to earn toads that will unlock useful bonuses and *Super Mario Run* easily justifies its asking price.

>> Score **78%**



Fate/Extella: The Umbral Star

» System: PS4 (tested), PS Vita
» Buy it for: £49.99 **» Buy it from:** Retail, online

Like *Hyrule Warriors* before it, the latest game from the *Fate* series (which itself is connected to the older *Fate/stay night* visual novel) looks to the *Dynasty Warrior* franchise for inspiration. *The Umbral Star* sees you taking on hordes of enemies with outrageous attack moves in an attempt to overthrow each area's overlord.

Levelling up characters unlocks a large number of useful skills and some insanely over-the-top finishing moves, while the many available fighters all play differently to each other.

As you might expect, the story is utter bobbins and will make no sense if you've not played *Fate/Extra* on PSP, but the core gameplay is certainly fun, while it lasts…

>> Score **64%**

» [Amstrad CPC] How the west was won, Amstrad style.



Gaming NEWS



» [Amstrad CPC] *Dragon Attack* gets extremely heavy on the bullets.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

At the end of 2016 there was a surge of new games for the Amstrad CPC courtesy of the CPC RetroDev competition. In all, there were 11 entries that covered a range of genres, but a couple in particular caught our attention. For a start there is *Hire Hare*, the story of hare sorceress Hecatia whose services have, as the title might suggest, been hired to take on Lycurgus, an evil warlock who has his own isometric 3D lair packed to the brim with some less-than-friendly creatures and a collection of dastardly traps. Fortunately, Hecatia can call upon the power of the nine mystical black lamps which can cast a little light on the path ahead, but can she defeat the warlock?

Dragon Attack is a shoot-'em-up and is probably one of the busier examples on an 8-bit system – there are projectiles by the bucket-load which need to be avoided while slinging bullets upwards at the enemy and each stage is busier than the last. The player's craft has a small hitbox which goes towards making dodging more viable and there's no background graphics to obscure all of those bullets, either. For the more cerebral gamers there is *Ice Slider* which is a puzzle game from EgoTrip and stars Princess Amy, this time tasked by the legendary wizard Merlin with retrieving power crystals in ice-laden caves where stopping is a matter of aiming for a wall and hoping for the best.

Speaking of puzzles, one of the more surreal entries was *Hair Boy* where a surprisingly cheerful-looking severed head with an impressive blonde mane has to be guided through single-screen, platform-based challenges, deftly leaping and wall jumping around at will over or through hazards, despite being somewhat lacking in the body department. And, finally, there's the competition winner *Outlaws*, a third-person shooting-gallery-style game with a Wild West theme to it and some very slick graphics. The controls might feel a bit twitchy to begin with but it doesn't take long to settle into the action.

There's plenty more where those came from including a couple of different puzzle games, some 3D dungeon crawling and even an ice hockey game with penguins which has been called *Pingu Soccer*! Everything you need can be found behind Kikstart.eu/cpc-dev-2016 and Amstrad fans have a lot of new titles to keep them busy well into 2017.



» [Amstrad CPC] Isometric fun on the CPC, featuring some fairly well-drawn characters.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **darran.jones@futurenet.com**



» [Windows] We're all Doomed!

SUBTRACT ONE DIMENSION

The original *Doom* has been a trope of retro gaming for quite a while now, but what if all that 'newfangled' 3D just seems too modern? Well, now there's *Mini Doom* on Windows which takes the gist of id Software's seminal first-person game and turns it into a 2D scrolling platformer! The gameplay has changed, of course, because a direct translation was never going to be viable, but it's still a fun take with some solid pixel art. Use the portal at Kikstart.eu/mini-doom-win for the Game Jolt page and further information.

> **"Mario has put in a new appearance on Commodore's Amiga"**



» [Amiga] It's a him, Mario!

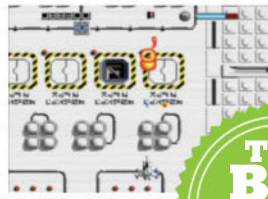
CALL THE PLUMBER

The ever-popular plumber Mario has recently put in a new, pretty good-looking, but unofficial, appearance on Commodore's Amiga, courtesy of English Amiga Board poster Retro1234. It's still at a very early stage of development at the moment and, along with some slightly off controls, seems rather unstable, but hopefully those issues will be addressed as this intriguing project evolves.

There's a playable preview, which we've been trying out in both hard disk and bootable floppy image formats, behind Kikstart.eu/mario-amiga, along with some discussion about the pitfalls of fan games.

·HOMEBREW HEROES·

Bitvision Software is the developer behind Codename: Intruder and, since Alastair Brown was the project lead for said MSX blaster, we intruded on his space to talk further about developing it







***Codename: Intruder* is substantial, how long did it take to develop?**

From start to finish, around eight months. The team for this particular project was made up of a main coordinator, a coder, three graphic designers and a musician. Additional testers were also used as the project began to take shape. As well as having UK-based members, the team also consists of members based in Spain and Holland.

Extra hardware is required, when was the decision taken to do that?

Right from the outset the aim was to utilise the V9990 graphics cartridge. This cartridge was first developed in Holland around 1994 and sold under the name of GFX9000. Then a couple of years ago a Brazilian MSX team decided to produce a new batch of this cartridge, calling it the V9990 Power Graph. The main problem that any MSX fan faces when buying this piece of hardware is that other than viewing some nice demos and playing the odd unfinished project, there is not a lot else made for it. We decided that as there had been a renewed interest in this device then it would be good to develop a game that uses it!



» [MSX] Would you think the boy is strange? Ain't he strange?

Were there any high or low points during the development?

There were many high points: seeing the graphic designer's interpretation of the early ideas was great, hearing the amazing tunes for the first time that John Hassink – our Dutch musician – had composed are a couple that spring to mind. Low points would better be described as times of frustration. This came from a lack of knowledge and inexperience of working with the V9990 chip. We were also determined to make this game work on all models of MSX, which was a real problem in terms of speed and resources – just 16K of RAM – but we managed it!

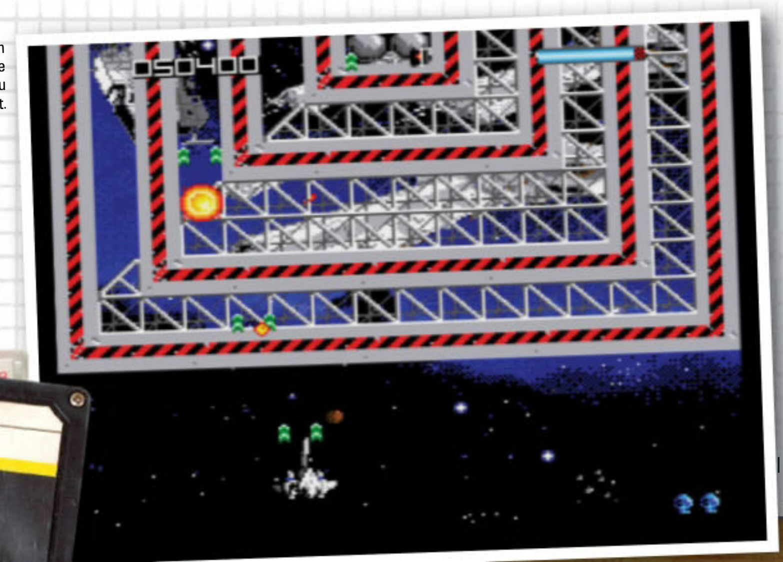
Also, as the team is located in different countries and speak different languages and that all communication was done over the net, this added to the challenge.

What kind of feedback have you received so far?

The feedback has been extremely positive. On 8 October we were able to showcase *Codename: Intruder* at large retro events in Manchester and Barcelona and everyone seemed amazed with what they were seeing! We then did a deal with an MSX cartridge maker, and as far as I know everyone who has bought it is happy.

Finally, does the team have any future plans that our readers would be interested in?

At the moment we are about to finish a mini MSX game that again utilises the V9990 chip, this will be available early 2017. We also have a nice MSX2 game that was started in 2015 but has not been worked on for a few months. We could use another graphic designer if anyone is interested!



» [MSX] In space, no one can hear you shoot.

Gaming
REVIEWS

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Mental Image Gamedisk 1 is a compilation of three public domain games for the Amiga which was released in 1991. Included on the disk is a solid rendition of Jeff Minter's early-Eighties arena shooter *Gridrunner* to blast away at, and an okay, but flawed, *Breakout* variant with power-ups called *Rebound*, but the cream of the crop has to be *The Invaders*.

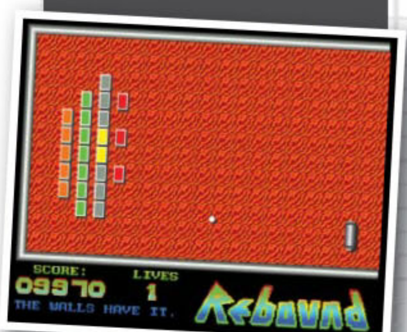
This is a bi-directional scrolling shooter inspired by, amongst others, *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, where a formation of battleships crawl towards the player's base. Each craft is trigger happy, maintains its own altitude and is capable of sustaining significant amounts of damage before being downed. *The Invaders* has plenty of that 'one more go' factor and, when the player craft's shield is low, can be a surprisingly tense experience.



» [Amiga] Jeff Minter's *Gridrunner*, remixed 1991 style for the Amiga.



» [Amiga] *Attack Of The Mutant Invaders*, or *The Invaders Strike Back*?





» [MSX] The first boss is not exactly stingy with the bullets!

CODENAME: INTRUDER

» **FORMAT:** EXPANDED MSX » **DEVELOPER:** BITVISION SOFTWARE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/INTRUDER-MSX » **PRICE:** €39


» [MSX] A fleet of spaceships acting as the background for the battle.


» [MSX] Nobody seems pleased to see the intruder, perhaps everyone owes it money?

The early warning orbital station Flashing Gamma Star has detected an inbound craft which, based on the pervious incursion of a similar vessel which was unsuccessful, but still caused extreme damage to the defences, has been classed as hostile. Every station has been put on red alert and all five high-defence zones have been readied and are standing by to take on the lone attacker.

That might sound a little strange, but the plot of *Codename: Intruder*, as conveyed by its manual, has something of a twist on the classic shoot-'em-up storyline since it's written from the perspective of the forces that are on the brink of being attacked! Is the protagonist out to save the universe this time around, or a brigand aiming to destroy an otherwise peaceful civilisation? We will skip over the morality of the situation and instead concentrate on how much fun can be had by causing space-bound carnage.

Each of the previously-mentioned high-defence zones is a large, vertically-scrolling stage which is heavily populated by a range of attackers and rounded off with a boss. The nasties start out quite trigger happy and lose their inhibitions completely by the end of the first stage, so it's fortunate that the player's craft has a quite robust energy shield offering some protection from enemy fire – this can be topped up during a stage with one of the available power ups, while others offer better firepower, extra lives and a recharge for the ship's discharge battery, essentially a smart bomb which clears the entire screen.

This isn't an easy game so the intruder's mission is going to require quite a bit of practise and solid joystick skills; it'll be somewhat frustrating at first and will undoubtedly continue to challenge even skilled pilots even after that point, but that isn't a bad thing and *Codename: Intruder* is entertaining stuff with good music and parallax scrolling graphics that reminds us of the earlier days of the 16-bit era.

>> Score **80%**

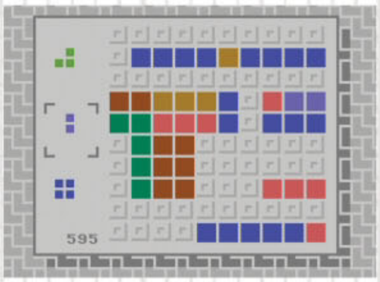
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1010!

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 16 » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** LEGION OF DOOM
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/1010-264

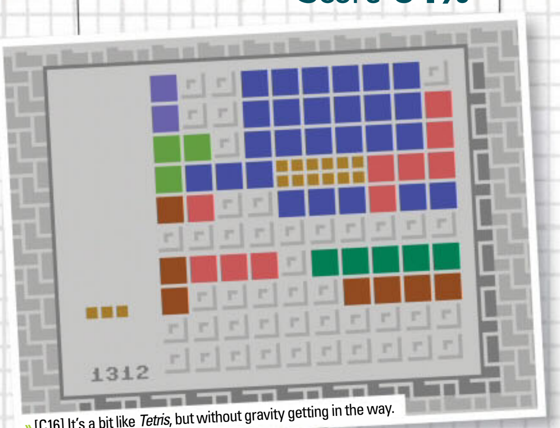


» [C16] A little bit left, now just a touch to the right… there!

This is a puzzle game where an initially empty 10x10 cell playfield must be populated with shapes which appear in groups of three on the left. The objective is to create solid rows or columns which will then disappear and the shapes currently waiting to be used can be placed in any order the player desires or indeed any position on the playfield, assuming that all of the cells it overlaps aren't occupied. The game ends when there's a shape pending with no clear space available.

Like all good puzzle games, this is simple fare but still remarkably addictive at the same time; there's no ticking clock to worry about so moves can be mulled over at length, but trying to plan too far in advance can prove fatal as well if the wrong shape comes out. *1010!* is definitely worth downloading for your C16 or Plus/4.

» Score **84%**

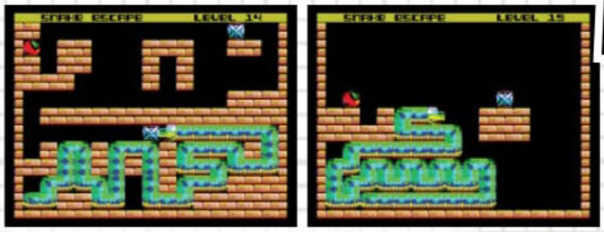


» [C16] It's a bit like *Tetris*, but without gravity getting in the way.



SNAKE ESCAPE

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SNAKE-ESCAPE-SPEC » **DEVELOPER:** EINAR SAUKAS



» [ZX Spectrum] Slowly snaking around the screen, trying to reach the apple.

Snake Escape is a platform-based puzzle game where the primary objective on each level for the titular reptile is simply to reach a juicy-looking apple. The snake gets longer as each move is made and can be guided left or right freely as long as there are no obstructions. Going upwards is an option for a short distance as well – his face will change colour to indicate how uncomfortable the position currently is – so climbing further will need some planning.

At the start of the game, there are a few easier puzzles to teach the player about their new environment, but after that point things rapidly become tricky and getting to the goal takes some serious thought. There isn't the pressure of a timer here, and pressing fire will restart the current stage without any penalties, so different strategies can be considered for each stage and then tested.

» Score **86%**



ROUNDUP

A couple of Christmas entries that arrived a little too late to make it into the previous issue; first of all we have *Shotgun X-Mas Edition* on the C64 which is the single screen shoot-'em-up for up to four players that we've looked at previously but given a festive overhaul because the season of good will is all about fir trees and assault rifles!

Our second title is *Zombo's Christmas Capers*, a second unofficial outing on the Spectrum for 2000AD's undead character who steps in to help out at the government's behest when none other than Santa has a psychotic episode and disappears from his workshop without warning. There are also presents for Zombo to find at the same time and an end of game boss to defeat.



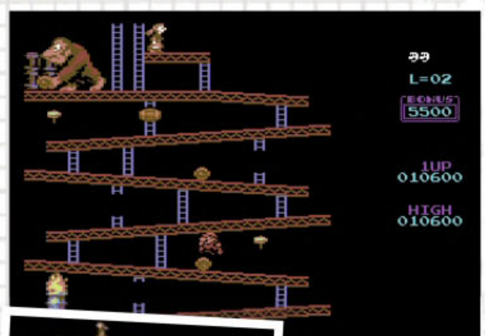
DONKEY KONG

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** OXYRON » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DK-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

The titular gorilla has kidnapped Pauline, the girlfriend of a moustachioed workman, who some readers might have previously heard of, called Mario. The angry gorilla has carried the poor damsel in distress to the upper reaches of a building site which must be traversed if she's to be rescued. There are patrolling enemies and falling barrels which the soon-to-be famous plumber must avoid, items which he'll need to collect and hammers that dish out a little retribution.

This is a nicely-executed and well-presented conversion of Nintendo's 1981 coin-op which was developed by the same person who ported the Vectrex titles *Fortress Of Narzod* and *Minestorm* to the C64 and, as with his previous work, the attention to detail here is commendable. That does mean that saving Pauline from Kong's clutches won't rapidly become a challenge but that's the way this game should be.

» Score **80%**





» [C64] It's been over three decades, but Mario is back on old but familiar ground.

» [C64] Something in the health and safety regulations covers this, right?



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STAR LETTER

A WORLD OF SPECTRUM WOES

Dear **RG**,
What on earth has happened to the Spectrum community? Sites such as World Of Spectrum and Your Sinclair used to be fantastic places to visit, but now they are broken beyond repair (World Of Spectrum) or have disappeared completely (Your Sinclair). The community also seems to be at war over the Spectrum Vega+ with huge arguments over the incoming release of the device and whether it's actually going to be released. Social media has become an awful battleground over the past few months and I've watched my beloved community get fractured until it's almost unrecognisable. I love retro gaming and I love the Spectrum, but in the last few years I've seen an ugly side of the community that saddens me deeply. After everything that has happened in 2016 you would think communities would pull together, not needlessly snipe at each other.
A disappointed Spectrum owner



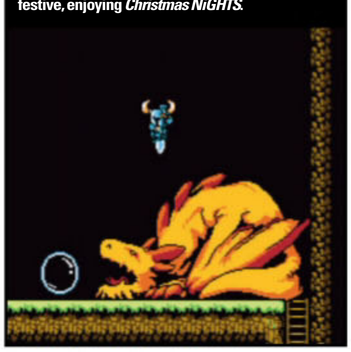
» There's a lot of controversy surrounding the Vega+, with some questioning whether it will arrive at all.

It would appear that there's a great story to be told about the fallout that has been happening within the Spectrum community at the moment, but as it's still happening, we're waiting for the dust to settle first. A lot of it does seem to be tied to the ongoing problems surrounding the new Vega (with two camps forming) so it's going to be interesting to see if the eventual release of it will heal that rift. Here's hoping both World Of Spectrum and Your Sinclair are both revitalised in the new year.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Christmas games

In addition to spending time with friends and family, everyone has been playing games over Christmas. Drew has been enjoying *Shovel Knight*, Darran was disappointed by *The Last Guardian*, Sam decided to try *Fire Emblem*, while Nick got festive, enjoying *Christmas NiGHTS*.



PITFALLS OF PRINT

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
Why is it that you rarely cover Kickstarters in a magazine based on classic games these days? Small companies need all the help they can get and it annoys me that you don't support them when they are facing their most critical challenge. Who knows? If you ran interviews in the magazine when the projects were on release then you might be able to help them reach their goals. As a supporter of classic games I really feel that you should be doing a lot more than you are currently doing.
Yours disappointedly,
Michael James

Thanks for your email, Michael. The nature of print means that we are typically always too late to cover Kickstarters while they are running, and it's pointless covering them in the magazine when they fail to reach their targets. We do support them online via the website and social media when they are first running, following up any coverage with magazine interviews once they finally reach funding.

RETRO GOGGLEBOX

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I have recently seen two pure gems on television, which (hopefully) did not pass under the **Retro Gamer** team's radar.

The first was Dara O'Briain's *Go 8 Bit*, a lighthearted, but nostalgic, show where 'celebrities' challenged each other to gain the highest scores on various retro games from my childhood.

The second was the rebooted version of *Time Commanders*, which used the *Total War* engine to reenact famous battles and make history much more exciting than it ever was in some dreary school classroom.

I would dearly like to see many more episodes of these limited run shows produced – or something very similar – as in recent years (save for *Videogame Nation*) the television media has frowned upon computer games as something only little kids play.

Time to prove them wrong!
Yours faithfully
D. O'Conner



» We're hoping that Dave will continue to tweak *Go 8 Bit* as it did improve over the duration of the first series.

RETRO TV TRIUMPH

Dear sir or madam,
Although I am not sure if it can be regarded as retro, even though the last series was 11 years ago and the game engine used was established much earlier than that, but (at the risk of heading into Geekdom here!) I am really enjoying the brand new series of *Time Commanders*.

The host, Gregg Wallace, is certainly enthusiastic about his subject and behaves like a little kid in a sweet shop for much of the time, while the two resident experts give some insightful information on the equipment, generals and strategies of the armies involved.

Yet, for me, the real star of the show is the *Total War* technology used on the programme, which allows for thousands of soldiers to fight it out on the virtual battlefield to see if the contestants' tactics end in glorious triumph or humiliating failure.

It's a pity there are only three episodes but hopefully we will not have to wait more than a decade for the next series!
Yours faithfully
Stuart Hardy

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Glad to hear you have both been enjoying the two new shows. We felt *Go 8 Bit* started off poorly but got better towards the series' end and are pleased that it has been renewed for a second season. As for *Time Commanders,* we actually missed it, but are big fans of the original series and plan to run an article on the *Total War* franchise in 2017. Watch this space, as they say.

BIFFO BLUES

Dear Paul Rose,

I read your article on console tribalism with great interest and whilst your observations on tribalism may ring true in terms of nationalism, I am going to have to disagree with you on the console front. Back in the days of the Spectrum, people had one or the other depending on income and, of course, the luck of the draw as to what your parents bought you. However, as a Spectrum owner I used to look forward to playing my friends Commodore 64 and vice versa – likewise the Apples at school. There was never any defence or anger over the systems – just awe in most cases and a good dose of patience.

As to brain capacity having a bearing on your choice of system, I would hope that as a journalist dealing in the gaming market you would be aware of the fact that the examples you have used are as relevant as comparing a horse and cart to an automobile. Both were cutting edge in their time but the world moves on and so do we – hence this Atari, Spectrum, Mega Drive owner now possess a Xbox One and PS4 – or is that evolution?

Sean Beech

Whilst you're quite right that many owners of different systems did get on with each other, that wasn't always the case we're afraid, Sean. As an Amstrad owner, Darran was bullied at school because his mum was too poor to buy him a 'proper computer', while Drew was attacked in the playground for suggesting that his Mega Drive was better than the SNES. With regards to the comparison between the consoles, it's worth noting that all but one (the Wii) are considered part of the same 32-bit generation so Paul's point still stands from that perspective.

LET'S D'OH MR DRIVER!

Hi guys,

I've just subscribed to the magazine and I really love it. Just read the *Chase HQ* article, which brought back great memories. One issue though. The main car used in the game was a Porsche 928 S4 not a 911. I look forward to future issues. Cheers!

Alex

Thanks Alex, you're just one of the many people who spotted the error. The game doesn't list the cars by name, so we tried to identify them ourselves. We know games, but not cars. Maybe someone can subscribe us to a suitable retro car magazine?



» [Arcade] This is most definitely *not* a Porsche 911. Thanks to everyone that helpfully corrected us.



From the forum

» www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know...

What's your favourite survival horror game?

ncf1
Resident Evil 4. Just like a great music album, crafted and perfected from start to finish, with no filler – an all-time classic. In fact, it's the greatest game ever for me, and I'm still not bored with it after countless plays!

greenberet79
Aliens on the Spectrum (US version). Looks great, clever mechanism using six switchable characters, the sensation of going round in circles (in a good way), and most of all the sound effect of the alien being in the nearby vicinity and the nerve-shredding, quick-fire encounter of you versus them. TENSION!

Mayhem
Project Firestart (C64) – one of the earliest survival horror-type games, an incredible achievement for the C64, with tension, many places to explore, mutants, a mystery plot, a damsel to rescue and even more mutants...

Necronom
Probably the *Dead Space* games. They had excellent design, and a great story.

Markopoloman
Retro – it has to be the C64 version of *Aliens* (UK version). Scared the shit out of me in a dark bedroom all alone. Modern - *Outlast* on PC.



» [PC] *Dead Space 2* took a leaf out of *Resident Evil 4*'s books and dramatically ramped up the action.

Again, in a dark room all alone... you just feel there is someone behind you and you need to look over your shoulder!

thingonaspring
Black Friday at Asda.

Hiro
Project Firestart. From the 'Danger' written in blood to the game's climax, it's a game with incredible tension and atmosphere on the C64.

RetroMartin
Mine was *Resident Evil Nemesis*. Aside from the Nemesis lurking around, I felt there was more path branching and replayability then the second game.

jdanddiet
If you'd had asked me that at any point in the last 20 years, I'd have said *Resident Evil*. However, having played *Alien Isolation* last year, that's now a clear favourite in the genre for me.

retro GAMER

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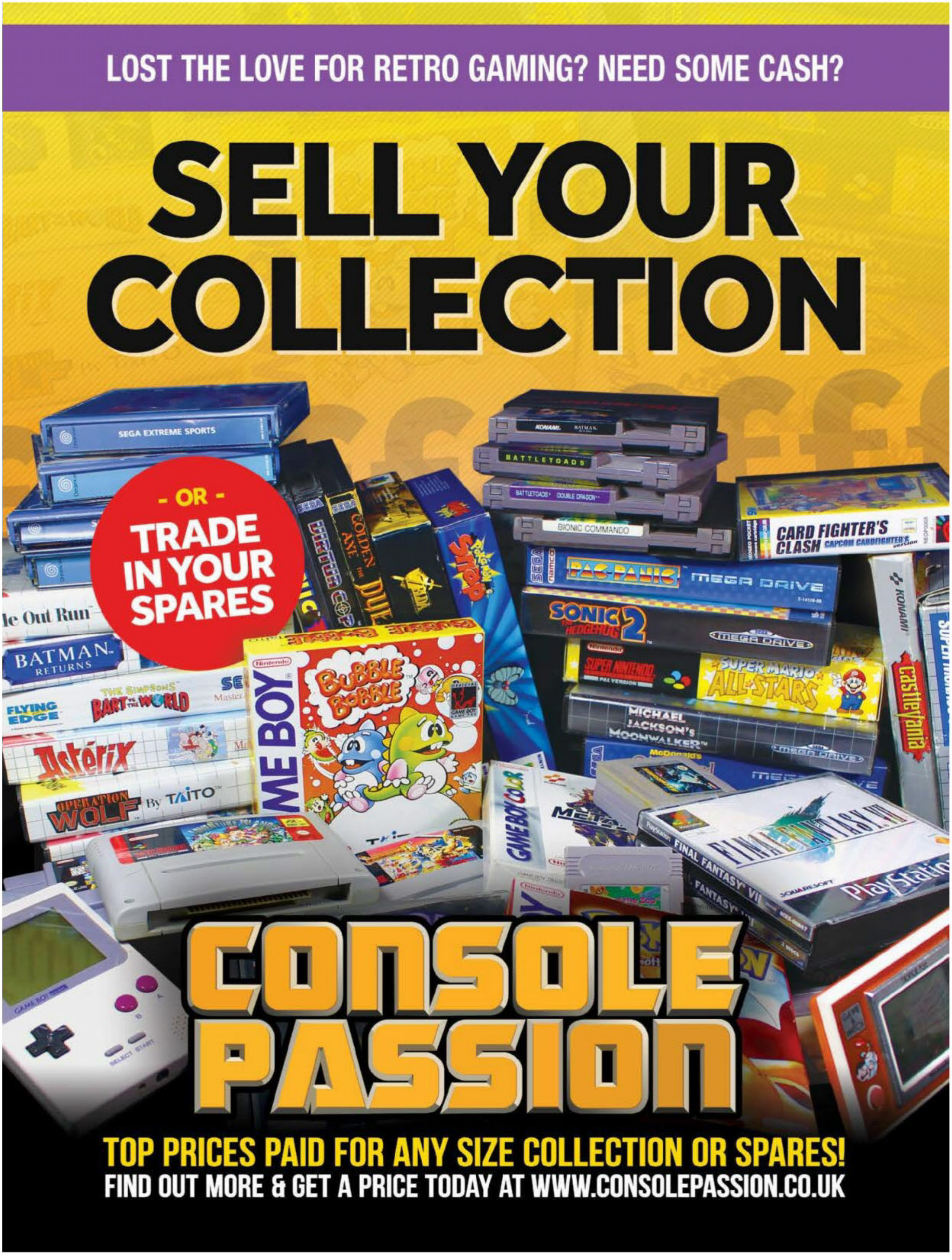


Developers celebrate Commodore's 16-bit masterpiece

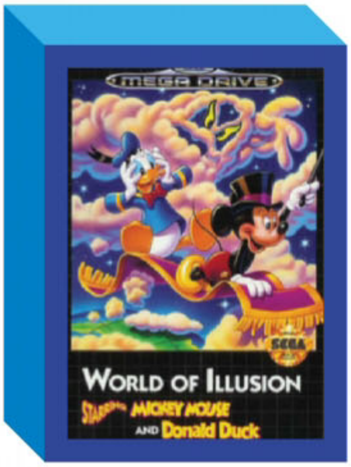
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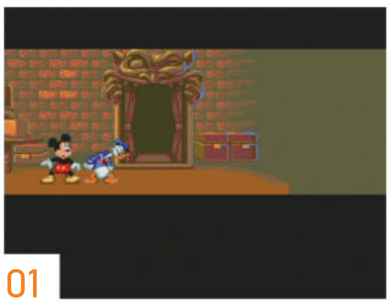

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ENDGAME



WORLD OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE AND DONALD DUCK

» Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck have been feuding for years, with Donald constantly frustrated at playing second fiddle to a 'talentless hack' (his words, not ours). Enraged by the success of Castle Of Illusion, he demanded, and received, his own game, Quackshot, but only if he agreed to team up with Mickey in World Of Illusion…



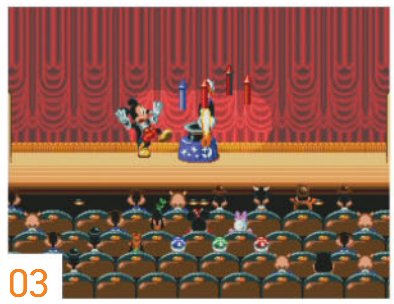
01

» With the evil Pete defeated, our heroes fall through a portal and wind up home, right before they were planning a magic trick. "We'd have gotten here a lot quicker if I didn't have to pull your fat ass through tree stumps," grumbles Mickey.



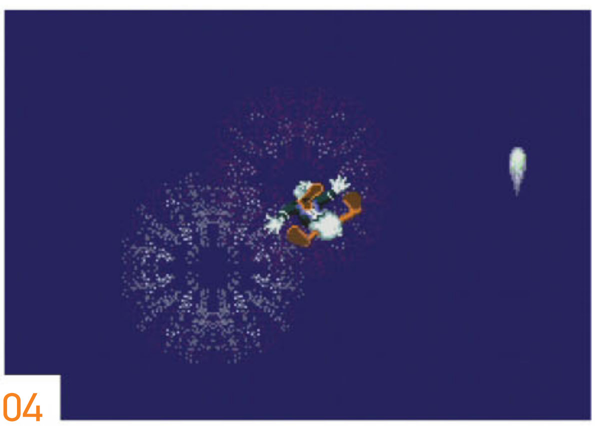
02

» On stage, Donald's impatience gets the better of him and he starts rummaging through the top hat, failing to understand why the scorpions he placed there to sting Mickey are no longer there. Something is there, though, and it feels like a fuse…



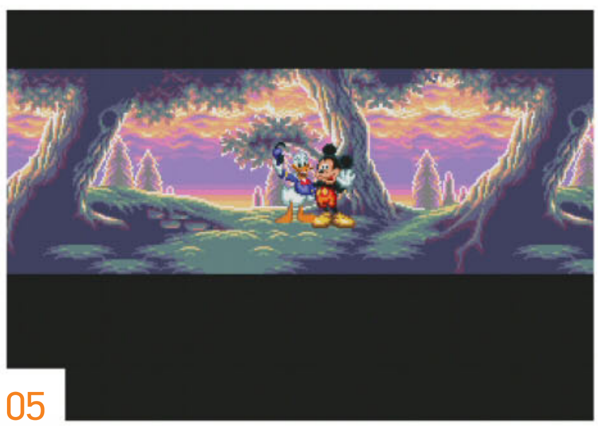
03

» As a rocket explodes in Donald's face, he realises that he wasn't the only one planning shenanigans. "That's for convincing me that a videogame adaptation of *Fantasia* was a good idea, you incompetent mallard" yells Mickey.



04

» "Damn you Mickey, damn you to hell," croaks Donald as the force of the exploding fireworks sends him hurtling into the stratosphere. As he plummets back to Earth, Donald considers the best way to get his revenge and wonders how much rat poison costs and how effective it is on stupid orange dogs.



05

» Donald vows to never work with Mickey again as he's sick of playing his stooge in front of all of his friends. He soon changes his mind when the producers tell him how well *World Of Illusion* has sold and he sees the size of his royalty cheque. Maybe that daft old mouse isn't that bad after all…


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